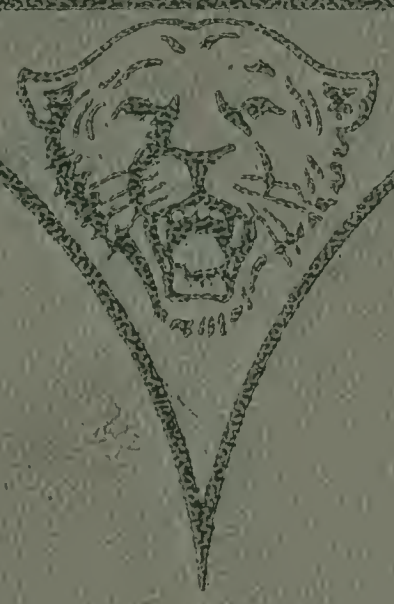
FZ
10
3
.A869
Wi
copy 2.

FT MEADE
GenColl

# Wild Americans



E. OREN ARNOLD

Class PZ10

Book .3 .A8c9

Copyright No. Wi

Copy 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

# WILD AMERICANS

# WILD AMERICANS

*By*

OREN ARNOLD

*Author of*
*Wonders of the West*
*Wild Life in the Southwest, etc.*

*Illustrated with Photographs*

*JUNIOR PRESS BOOKS*
ALBERT WHITMAN & CO
*CHICAGO*
1937

Copy 2

Copyright, 1937, by Albert Whitman & Company

PZ10
.3
.A869
Wi
Copy 2

Printed in the U. S. A.

SEP 22 1937

©CI A 109540

*Dedicated*
*with love to*
*Rosemary*
*my very little daughter*
*who is herself something of a*
*Wild American*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the finest wild life photographs ever made are included in this book, and where source is known grateful acknowledgment for them is hereby given:

To E. D. Newcomer of Phoenix, Arizona, for the Gila monster and cactus on page 86; to W. M. Tillery of Phoenix and Denver for the grizzly bear on page 121, also for many personal helps to the author in making the general selection; to Jack Tooker of Grand Canyon, Arizona, for the bison on page 113 and the twin fawns on page 13; to Lewis W. Walker of San Diego, Calif., for the jackrabbit on page 57, also for the bobkitten on page 149 and the bobcat on page 153; to Charles J. Belden of Pitchfork, Wyoming, for the coyote on the half-title page and the coyote on page 70; to Natt N. Dodge of Grand Canyon, Arizona, for the squirrel on page 133; to L. A. Wilke of El Paso, Texas, for the jackrabbit on page 62.

To the National Association of Audubon Societies for the photograph by Howard Cleaves of the opossum on page 159 and of the opossum family on page 154; to Nature Magazine for the pocket gopher on page 24, the grizzly bear on page 121, and the pack rat photograph on page 41 by H. S. Davis; to Acme Newspictures for the mountain lion on copyright page and on page 45; to the Field Museum of Natural History for the beavers on page 107; to Frashers, Inc., of Pomona, Calif., for the bobcat on page 144, the buck on page 9, and the fawn on page 16; to Pictures, Inc., for the coyote pups on page 65; to the Union Pacific Railroad for the brown bear facing page 9; to the American Museum of Natural History for the squirrel on page 131, the bison group on page 120, and the grizzly bear on page 130; to Brownell Photos for the bald eagle facing page 98; to Underwood and Underwood for the young bald eages on page 97; to the National Park Service for the bighorn sheep on page 71; to the Department of the Interior for the bighorn sheep on page 79; to the U. S. Forest Service for the beaver on page 105, the coyote on page 63, the deer on page 17, and the deer on page 11 by A. G. Hamel; to the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey for the wolverene on page 139, the skunks on page 80, the pack rat on page 36, the pocket gopher on the title page, the pocket gopher on page 27, and the grasshopper sketches on pages 30 and 35.

Specific warning against copying any of the pictures, in direct violation of federal law, is hereby given.

# CONTENTS


PAGE

The Deer: A Tan Beauty ..... 9
The Armadillo: An Armored Creature ..... 18
The Gopher: An Animal with Pockets ..... 24
The Grasshopper: A Flying Pest ..... 30
The Pack Rat: The Trader ..... 36
The Panther: A Lassoed Lion ..... 42
The Horned Lizard: A Tiny Reptile ..... 51
The Jack Rabbit: A Long-Eared Jumper ..... 57
The Coyote: A Wild Dog ..... 63
The Rocky Mountain Bighorn:
A Bold Mountaineer ..... 71
The Skunk: A Fearless Enemy ..... 80
The Gila Monster: An Arizona Stranger ..... 86
The Pelican and the Gulls: A Strange Rivalry ..... 91
The Eagle: Majestic Sky King ..... 97
The Beaver: Chief Gnawer ..... 105
The Wild Bison: A Former Westerner ..... 113
The Bear: Monarch of the Wild ..... 121
The Squirrel: A Friendly Robber ..... 131
The Wolverene: A Mean Northerner ..... 139
The Lynx: A Wilderness Cat ..... 144
The Opossum: A Night-Roaming Animal ..... 154

## Chapter I

## THE DEER: A Tan Beauty

"SHH-H-H, we'll have to be very quiet now," Uncle Ely Blair whispered. "Just hide here in the soft grass and peep out. The wind's right, so they won't catch a whiff of us, if they do come."

Buck and Ginger Blair said not a word. They sat still. Through the tall stems of grass and weeds they could look down at the pool of water, not three hundred feet away. It was the only water within many miles, they knew, and here at sunrise Uncle Ely had promised that "something might happen."

Many things had already happened to Billy Buck and Mary Virginia Blair (nicknamed Ginger) since they left their home in the East. Uncle Ely, Father's bachelor brother, who lived on a ranch in Texas, was taking the family on a long automobile tour. They lived in a shiny new trailer. Uncle Ely loved the outdoors, especially its animals, which he called "wild Americans."

This morning they were in western Texas. The grass was dry and tall and it tickled Virginia's nose, so that she thought she would have to sneeze. Somehow she knew that wouldn't be a wise thing to do. Suddenly Billy Buck grabbed her arm.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Uncle Ely.

Over the top of the shrubs and brush that lined the trail to the water hole, they saw something strange. The brush was rattling and waving, and above it appeared a great set of animal horns, branched like the limbs of a tree.

"Look—antlers!" whispered Uncle Ely.

"What are antlers?" Ginger whispered back.

Buck answered her. As big brothers do, he wanted to show her that he knew.

"They're horns," he whispered. "Deer horns. I've seen pictures of them."

"That's right," said Uncle Ely.

One scrubby oak tree near the water hole had begun to turn a little brown. A few of its leaves had red tints, for autumn was approaching.

Suddenly, through the leaves of this tree, came the antlers. A huge buck deer thrust his head out and looked at the water. He was still for a few seconds, then he stepped out in full view.

What a picture he made!

Buck and Ginger held their breath, not daring even to whisper. Here was a real, live, wild deer, one of the finest of American animals. They knew he would be afraid of them, and would instantly dash away if

he should catch their scent. That was why Uncle Ely had stationed them where the wind would not take the man-odor toward the water hole.

However, the buck waited cautiously before drinking. He lifted his head to scent the air delicately, thus making sure that no enemy was near enough to spring on him without warning.

Next he made a motion with his short bushy tail, shook his head and moved toward the water. Then came another surprise to the children.

Behind him in the brush appeared three beautiful does—female deer. They had remained out of sight until the male made sure that no enemy was near the water. When he signaled them with a snort and a wave of his tail, they came out of hiding.

The big fellow took a quick drink, then jumped nimbly onto the stream bank and looked all around. While each doe drank her fill, he stood guard, looking, sniffing. His great antlers were beautiful indeed.

"Look, there are six points on each side of his horns!" whispered Uncle Ely. "That makes twelve in all. A twelve-point buck! That's a mighty fine animal."

"Couldn't we shoot him, if we had brought that big rifle of Dad's?" the boy whispered.

"Yes. But it wouldn't be any fun. We don't need his meat or his skin. Why kill a beautiful creature without reason?"

They watched the animals for several minutes. The deer did not suspect that they were being watched at first; but then the wind must have changed. All at once the four beasts lifted their noses, poised for just an instant, and then bounded away. It all happened so quickly that Ginger said afterward she could hardly see them go. Uncle Ely and the children then started back to the highway, for they were hungry for breakfast. Mother greeted them from the trailer.

"It was better than a zoo, Mother!" exclaimed Buck. "The deer were wild, and one had antlers. He is called a buck, and he was grand! I'm glad the boys call me Buck, now. He was leader of the—"

"Yes, and Mother," Ginger interrupted, "on the ride back Uncle Ely told us all about wild deer. The baby deer are called fawns, and they are spotted, and they—"

The boy and girl told all that they could remember of Uncle Ely's chat and he kindly corrected them in a few places where they made mistakes. Here are some of the things that Buck and Ginger learned.

All male deer grow antlers, and shed them once a year. All deer are ruminants, which means that they swallow their food hastily, then later return it to their mouths for chewing. Deer run very fast, and are good jumpers, too. Bucks fight with their antlers to determine which shall be the master of the does. They fight enemies, such as lions, with their antlers and hoofs. Baby deer, called fawns, are spotted tan and white. This is called protective coloring, because enemies cannot easily see them hidden in the brush, leaves, and shadows. Man is the worst enemy of deer. He kills many of them needlessly. A natural enemy is the big mountain lion or panther, which kills many deer. There are several kinds of deer, in-

cluding those called the white tail, the mule deer, the elk, and even the moose.

When breakfast was over Virginia and Buck asked Uncle Ely dozens of questions. Finally Ginger asked, "Will we see any more wild Americans, Uncle Ely? I mean, any more as pretty as the tan beauties?"

Uncle Ely smiled at her.

"Tan beauties! That's a good name for them," he said. "Yes, we shall see many others. None will be more beautiful than the deer, but some will be even more interesting. I promise you that this will be an adventure tour."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Buck. "Adventures!"

## Chapter II

## THE ARMADILLO: An Armored Creature

Early one morning Uncle Ely Blair called to the children, "Do you know what armor is?"

"Oh, yes!" Billy Buck answered. "The knights of old wore armor—queer-looking iron suits, like shells, that covered even the men's heads."

"That's right," said Uncle Ely. "A kind of shell, to keep the person inside from being hurt by enemies. Now, on our hike today, I hope to show you a little fellow wearing armor. He is no bigger than a pig. In fact, he looks very much like a pig."

Ginger looked at Uncle Ely in surprise.

"Why, Uncle Ely!" she exclaimed, "how can a little man in an armor look like a pig?"

Uncle Ely laughed heartily. "I didn't mean that; I meant to say that I am going to show you a little animal which lives in a hard shell. He makes us think of the armored soldiers of long ago. But come on, I'll show you."

Ginger and Buck and Uncle Ely started walking into the scrubby trees and grass, away from any road or house. They had walked for several minutes before they saw any animal; only birds circled above them. Presently Uncle Ely said, "Now look carefully. Near here I saw several armored fellows not long ago. I think they have a den close by."

The three walked in a big circle, kicking in the grass and in piles of dead limbs and leaves, but they found nothing at first. After a while, Billy Buck ran off to one side and suddenly called, "Uncle Ely, come here, please! I have found a strange-looking ball. It is almost as large as a basketball, like the one we have at school."

"A ball?" cried Ginger, running to him. Uncle Ely joined them.

"Yes, you found him, Buck. This is the little armored fellow."

"But this doesn't look like a pig! I thought you said it would be a wild animal."

"This is it. I didn't tell you all about him. I just told you that he has a shell. His shell is made of curved pieces, neatly fitted together, so that they can be folded. Whenever the animal sees or hears an enemy, he may decide to fold up inside his shell. Then he becomes a round ball, and here it is."

"Then the animal is inside, Uncle Ely?"

"Yes. See this oval pointed piece of shell? This is his head. It fits neatly into a groove, made especially for it, with the hard shell outside. His feet and tail are folded in, too. The shell on his back is made of nine hoops or bands, joined together, with larger pieces for the front and rear. They have all been drawn together to make the ball. Isn't it odd?"

"Yes, *sir!*" exclaimed Buck. "I never heard of anything like this."

"I never did, either," said Ginger.

They rolled the ball around, and it remained tightly closed. It could have been mistaken for a rock, or an old stump. The shell was dark brown and black. The children were greatly interested in it, but the animal refused to open his shell to let them see what he looked like inside.

"Come on, let's go away," suggested Uncle Ely. "He will not loosen his shell as long as we are here."

They walked on a short distance. Uncle Ely looked at the children and held his finger over his mouth, signaling them to be quiet. They began to walk without rustling leaves and sticks. Uncle Ely was in the lead. He moved very slowly. Suddenly he stopped, and again motioned to the children to be very quiet. He knelt down so that he could whisper to them.

"Sh-h-h-h! Look right over there, through that green bush. Part the leaves quietly so you can see."

Buck and Ginger slowly separated the leaves and peered through. In a little clearing not far away was a strange-looking family. A mother and four babies were nosing into the chips and leaves and grass.

The mother was no bigger than a small dog, and the babies were about the size of kittens. They had long pointed noses, short little legs with claws, and long tails. They had no hair or fur. But they had armor, as did the fellow who was shaped like a basketball.

These, however, were not rolled into balls. Their armor had been unfolded, and their bodies were long, much like pigs as Uncle Ely had said. They were also

rooting in the ground for bits to eat, as pigs do. The children watched them for several minutes, then Buck forgot and spoke aloud. "Gee, I'd like to catch one!"

*Rustle-rustle-rustle!* The family was gone!

They didn't curl into balls. They started running. Instantly Uncle Ely jumped out and gave chase. He crashed through the brush and leaves. In a moment, however, he called.

"Here is a baby one! Come and see it." The children hastened to him.

There, sure enough, was one of the babies, now curled into a ball no bigger than a large apple. Its shell was not hard to touch, as had been the shell on the grown animal. The baby's shell was more like leather.

"What became of the others?" Ginger asked. "Why didn't they roll up?"

"These animals have two ways to protect themselves," Uncle Ely explained. "They can run and hide, and they prefer to do that. Or they can quickly roll into balls. A few big animals, such as dogs and panthers, can tear into them, although it is hard to do. Most enemies cannot break through the shells, however."

"Shall we take this one home with us?" Buck asked, pointing to the baby rolled into a ball.

"No. He does no harm. It would be cruel to take him into captivity, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Buck, instantly sorry.

The three hikers walked on and talked a great deal about these odd animals. Uncle Ely said that the little armored fellows are found only in Texas, and in the neighboring country of Mexico. They have come into Texas from Mexico, and have not yet spread to other states.

The children and their uncle were almost home again when Ginger suddenly thought of something.

"Uncle Ely, you forgot to tell us the little armored fellow's name! What is he called?"

"Armadillo. Say it slowly: ar-ma-dill-o. The name is as odd as the animal."

The children practiced saying it. "What does the name mean?" Buck asked.

"It is a Spanish word, meaning 'little armored fellow,' " Uncle Ely explained as he smiled at the children. "So you see, Ginger, I really had told you his name, after all."

## Chapter III

## THE GOPHER: An Animal with Pockets

Billy Buck Blair awoke in the family trailer, wondering where they had stopped. He and Mary Virginia had gone to bed early, and Father had driven on while they slept.

Now Buck sat up in his bunk and peered out the window. The sun was just beginning its day. The car and trailer, Buck discovered, were parked not far from a stream—a perfect place for a camp. There was a cleared spot for a yard, room for a campfire, in fact everything they needed. But right in the middle

of their little yard were some peculiar mounds of dirt.

The mounds were fresh damp soil, not quite knee high. Buck stared at one of them, because he saw a hole beside it. Then something startled him.

All in an instant, more dirt was thrown up out of the hole, and he caught a glimpse of a gray, furry animal.

The boy made such a bustle and noise with his hurried dressing that he woke everybody. In two minutes he was outside, looking down the hole.

"Found a bear, young fellow?"

Buck jumped at the sound of Uncle Ely's voice. Uncle Ely had come outside, too, and was smiling down at his nephew.

"No—I don't know, sir. I don't know what it is."

Uncle Ely squatted on his heels, cowboy fashion, and looked at the hole and mound of dirt.

"A gopher made that, Buck," he explained.

"Oh, no, sir! It was an animal. I saw him throwing up dirt."

Uncle Ely laughed heartily. "That's all right. The gopher is the animal you saw. That's what I meant."

"Oh."

"Yes. He's down there, waiting for us to go away so he can throw up more dirt. He is afraid of us."

"Does he live underground?" This question came from Ginger, who by this time had also dressed and hurried outside.

"Yes, Ginger, he does. Gophers are subterranean animals, which means they live under the ground. They are strange creatures, very destructive to grass, crops that the farmer grows, and almost every other kind of root. People call them the root-eaters."

"I never saw one," said Ginger.

"I just caught a glimpse," Buck explained. "I wish we could see him outside."

"After breakfast, I will ride over to the village here and get a trap," Uncle Ely promised. "A simple trap will catch him. The gopher is a very strange fellow, and I want you to become acquainted with him."

In the village near which the Blairs had camped for the night, the storekeeper told them that people had been trying to rid their farms of gophers. As he sold the Blairs a small wire trap, he explained to Uncle Ely, Buck, and Ginger that the little furry pests cost the farmers thousands of dollars yearly, by burrowing in the land to eat the roots of growing crops.

Uncle Ely showed the children how to set the trap, then pushed it down in the gopher hole about as far as Ginger's hand could reach.

"Now let's go away for an hour, and I'm sure we'll have him," Uncle Ely explained. "He will come to fill that opening to his hole, and be caught."

Uncle Ely was right.

When they came back to the trap just before noon, a bundle of fur was in it. At first there appeared to be no eyes, ears or legs. But when removed from the trap, the bundle of fur took form.

The eyes of a gopher are very small and hard to find in the fur. Ears are very tiny, too. The tail is short but stubby, and the short little legs have long claws, especially the front legs.

"He is almost blind because he lives mostly underground and doesn't have any light by which to see," explained Uncle Ely. "He can hear better than his ears indicate. He sees and hears with his tail."

"With his *tail?*" Buck and Ginger asked together. Even Mrs. Blair, who stood nearby, looked questioningly at Uncle Ely.

"Yes, with his tail. A gopher's tail is so sensitive that he can tell what kind of food it touches, and it aids in guiding him around his underground hallways. The scientists tell us his is a most unusual tail."

"I should think so!" agreed Mother.

"Look at his strong teeth, used for cutting roots, and the long sharp front claws used for digging. He digs dirt, then pushes it up with his shoulders, to make these mounds you see."

"But here, children, is the strangest thing of all. Did you know that the gopher is an animal with pockets?"

"No!"

"Yes, he is. Beside each jaw is a little pocket in his fur, just like the hip pocket in your trousers, Buck. It is big enough for you to put your thumb in, and about one inch deep in a big gopher. See?"

It was indeed a strange thing—a furry little beast with two cheek pockets. Uncle Ely explained that he carried food there, from wherever he found it, down his long hallways to his nest.

The gopher nest is made of grass several feet under

ground. The babies are born there. They drink their mother's milk, as kittens do. Soon they are able to hunt roots for themselves, and have little pockets of their own in which to carry the bits of food that they gnaw.

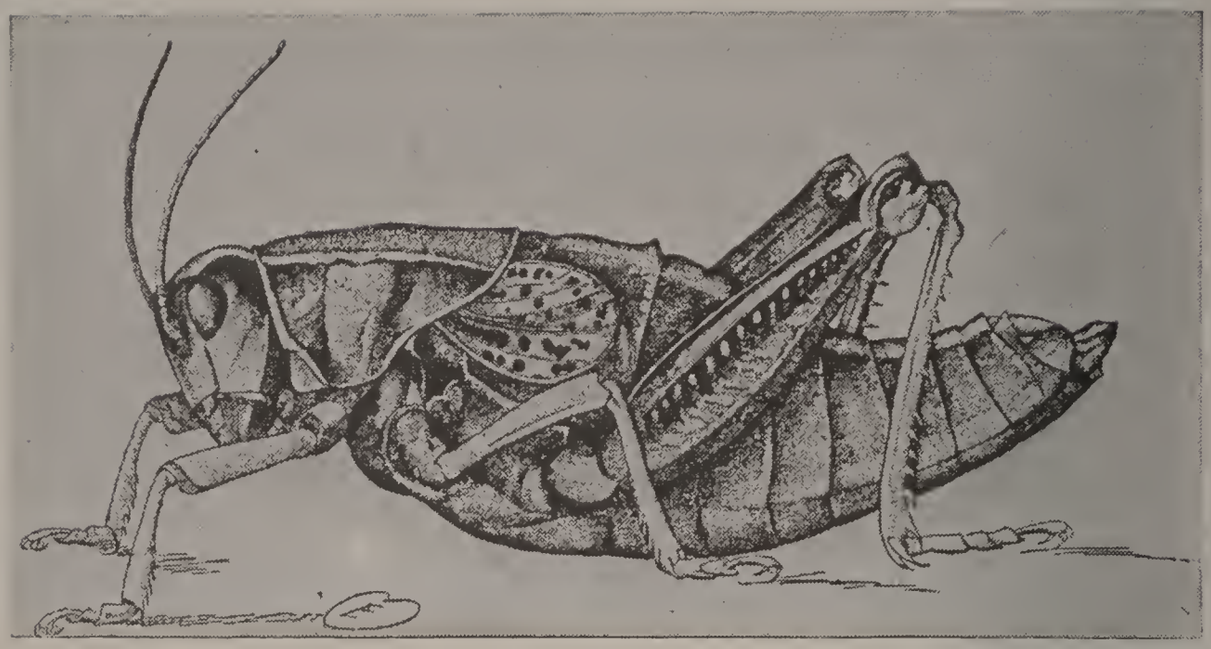
"I just thought of something else queer," said Uncle Ely. "Did you people know that this gopher, which is not much bigger than my hand, is related to those big fine deer we saw the other day?"

Nobody answered at first. Then Bob Blair, Uncle Ely's brother, spoke. "How do you explain that, Ely?"

"Well, they're both mammals. A mammal is any animal that feeds its young with mother's milk, as a cow does. The big deer, weighing three hundred pounds or more, is a mammal; and so is this little furry underground creature, the gopher."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Ginger. "There surely is a lot to learn about wild animals."

"Yes, Sis, but it's fun to know," said Buck. "Uncle Ely, when can we find something else wild?"



## Chapter IV

## THE GRASSHOPPER: A Flying Pest

Buck and Ginger were riding in the front seat of the car with Uncle Ely, who was driving. The afternoon was hot, and Buck was almost asleep. Ginger was daydreaming. Then there was a sudden noise. It came as a slap and a splatter all in one. Something had hit the windshield.

"Oh!" gasped Ginger, staring at the ugly spot on the glass.

Buck was instantly awake.

"Nothing but a grasshopper," he explained. "He made a nose dive into our windshield, and splattered."

The car and trailer roared on for a half mile when Mother Blair, who was in the back seat, suddenly cried out. The children turned to look at her.

"There's one in here now!" Mother cried. "Two of them. Fan them out, son."

The insects hopped up and out the car window. Others could be seen outside.

"Look," Ginger pointed, "they're flying. I thought grasshoppers hopped. I didn't know they could fly, as birds do."

Uncle Ely answered her with a chuckle, "Surely they can fly. Just look at them. Why, we're in a swarm of them!" He leaned down a bit to peer out through the windshield at the sky.

"They look like butterflies. See that great big one with the lacy wings!" exclaimed Ginger.

More grasshoppers were splattering against the windshield. Mother quickly closed the windows to keep them out of the car. Uncle Ely was muttering to himself, and staring at the sky again. "Millions of them," he was saying, "millions, and getting thicker."

Everybody began to look at the sky. The travelers suddenly remembered that they had been moving through a swarm of grasshoppers for several minutes, and the swarm was getting thicker. Uncle Ely

drove off the road and stopped the car. "Let's get out and look," he suggested.

He and the children stepped out of the sedan doors; then, with various exclamations, they hastened back inside again. The flying insects had appeared unafraid of them; some had crashed right into them, and were now striking the car from every direction.

Suddenly they heard a shout from the outside.

"Say, up there!" it was Father Blair's voice. "What is this? Can't a fellow take a nap without having you run into beehives?"

Father had been napping in the trailer, and when it stopped he was awakened.

"They aren't bees. But get your head back in and shut the window, before the trailer is full of them." Uncle Ely shouted through the whirring of the grasshopper wings. In a moment Father was in the sedan seat with Mother, as interested as the others had been.

"What do you make of it, Ely?" he asked, in a worried tone.

"Nothing to make of it. Just grasshoppers, and more grasshoppers."

"But I never knew they came in such hordes," Mother declared.

"Oh, yes, they certainly do! This will probably get worse."

It did get worse. Within five minutes, the sky was darkened by the invading insects, and they were settling down, too. There was no counting them, no guessing their numbers.

Soon the fields near the highway were alive with the pests. The fence wires were covered with them. The fence posts were "working" on every side, with grasshoppers on top of grasshoppers.

The car was covered. The pavement was "working" like the fence posts. The sun was almost invisible, because the sky was filled with the flying creatures.

The travelers sat and stared. Buck and Ginger were frightened, and Mother herself was quite alarmed. Uncle Ely looked at her and said, "Nothing to be afraid of. They don't bother people."

"But—what *do* they want, Uncle Ely?" Buck asked.

"Food. They're hungry, very hungry. They'll eat almost anything; plants, trees, even posts and hoe handles, and clothing, grass, flowers, anything! I've seen them like this only a few times in my life. Some years they are very bad, then we won't have many

for several years. Most of the western states have invasions like this at times.

"It's very bad, really, because they will destroy every crop in sight, and the farmers lose thousands, even millions of dollars. Half an hour from now that field you see will be stripped clean."

"Goodness!" Mother exclaimed softly.

Nobody was smiling now. Ginger looked at her uncle.

"Are they—are they wild animals, Uncle Ely?" she asked.

"Well, yes. Yes, they are. We don't ordinarily think of them as animals, but as insects, but they are wild just the same. I'd rather have a dozen mountain lions on my farm than to have these flying enemies."

"I never knew before that a grasshopper could do any harm," Billy Buck ventured, greatly interested.

"A grasshopper can't, Buck. But billions of grasshoppers can. They are destructive through force of numbers. Numbers, remember that—not one, or one thousand, or even one million; but billions and billions. Farmers can fight them with poison, and with traps, and other devices, but men can't do much to ward off such hordes of flying enemies as we see today.

"I have seen grasshoppers pile up against walls and fences like snowdrifts in winter. Once in a western city I saw them piled waist high on downtown sidewalks, where they had hit the sides of skyscrapers and fallen there in an ugly, writhing mass. I have seen them so thick that their greasy bodies made rails slippery and stopped trains. Even now, it would be unsafe to drive on this pavement, because they are so numerous our tires would skid on them.

"I am glad you are having this experience, sad as it is for our farmer folk and our flower gardeners nearby. Not many people know that grasshoppers can come in such numbers. A grasshopper usually is regarded as a creature in a fairy tale, a friendly old fellow who loafs and plays the fiddle all day. Some of them, with their wings spread, are beautiful enough to be in fairyland; but generally they are just destructive pests. In a little while we can drive on. The sky is much lighter now, and the swarm is moving. But you have seen something important today."

## Chapter V
## THE PACK RAT: The Trader

Ginger Blair awoke early one morning in the trailer and stretched and yawned. She sat up in bed, then suddenly she called, "Mother, where's my wrist watch?"

Mother awoke then. She told Ginger that she had not seen the watch.

"But it was right here under my bunk at bedtime. I put it there very carefully, on the floor. Now it's gone."

The talking woke everyone, and because Ginger still did not find her watch, all the family began to search for it.

No one could find it. In a little while, however, Uncle Ely spoke. "Who put this silk stocking in my coat pocket?" he asked.

"Not I," said Ginger, and every one else said, "Not I." Father was smiling. He thought the children must have been playing jokes. In a moment, however, he too called out.

"Here's your watch, Sister, inside of my vest. But my fountain pen is gone! What is this, anyway? Is somebody trying to play tricks on us?"

Then Uncle Ely began to chuckle, and everybody looked at him as if he were guilty. When they did so, he laughed.

"Don't look at me," he said, still laughing. "I'm not the joker. But I think I know who it was. It wasn't a member of the family, either."

"Then who could it be?" demanded Mother. "We are strangers here, just camping. I don't believe there is anybody near, not even a house in sight."

"Never mind where we are. We have neighbors. One of them is a little fellow with a long tail. He has a rabbit-like face, large ears, and a sleek coat."

"It's an animal, isn't it, Uncle Ely?" cried Ginger. "But what kind of animal could be stealing watches and fountain pens?"

"Yes, and putting silk stockings in people's coats?" added Father.

"A pack rat could," said Uncle Ely.

"A—a what?"

"Pack rat. Sometimes it is called a trade rat."

"Never heard of him," Father declared.

"Yes, you have, but you've forgotten. We used to see them when we were kids, Bob. But your children never have seen them, probably because they have been reared in an eastern city."

"Tell us about him, Uncle Ely," both children urged.

While the two men broke dead wood from bushes nearby to build a campfire for breakfast, Uncle Ely talked about the strange rat which is in all truth one of the most mysterious creatures in the American wilderness.

" 'Pack' is a western word, meaning to carry," Uncle Ely began. "We have pack horses, for instance. Well, sir, the pack rat is called that because he carries or packs things wherever he goes. He is not particular about what he carries—just anything that is shiny or small.

"We also call him trade rat, because he will trade one thing for another. If he is carrying a spoon from

somebody's kitchen—as he is likely to be doing if he enters a house—he may see a belt buckle that he likes better. Right then he will drop the spoon and pick up the buckle. A few feet farther on, he may trade the buckle for a pencil. You saw how he traded your watch for your father's fountain pen, Ginger."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now I want to find what he did with the fountain pen. I think we may locate it, too."

"How, Uncle Ely?"

"See that mound of sticks and thorny things over there, under that bush? That looks very much like a pack rat nest. If our visitor didn't trade the pen off before he got there, it will be in the nest. We will dig into it and see, after breakfast."

The two children talked about pack rats during the meal. They learned from Uncle Ely that these rats are common in the Southwest, that they are about the size of big house rats, but that they do not destroy much valuable property, and they can be tamed as pets.

When the dishes were all washed and the campfire carefully put out, Uncle Ely took a small shovel from the car and dug into the nest under the bushes. One of the rats was found, but he promptly hurried away.

There were many little underground trails or tunnels, and the doors or outlets of these were all carefully protected by clumps of dead cactus thorns which the rats had placed there. Uncle Ely explained that these thorns would keep coyotes, hawks, and other animals from capturing the rats.

In the nest the children found many things. There were stones and little sticks, tree buds, pieces of bone, a small tin can, and several nails. Buck and Ginger were talking about these things when Mother came to them.

"Isn't it interesting?" Mother stooped over to look at the pack rat home. "Did you find your fountain pen, Bob?"

"No, I didn't. Must have been another family that stole it. I hate to lose that pen, too."

Uncle Ely poked around in the nest.

"What's this?" asked Mother suddenly, as she stooped and picked up a bright shining object. "Why, I do believe it's my silver thimble!"

Father, Uncle Ely, Buck, and Ginger crowded close to see the shining thimble that lay in the palm of her hand.

"That's your thimble, all right!" exclaimed Father. "Here's your name engraved on it."

"Where did you last use it?" asked Uncle Ely.

"Let me think," answered Mother. "Oh, I remember, I used it to darn your socks, Father. Then I must have laid it on the running board of the car for a moment when I went to heat the water to begin supper. And I never thought of it again!"

"And the pack rat stole it?" demanded Buck.

"He must have," agreed Uncle Ely.

When Ginger heard that, she ran back to the car.

"You were right, Uncle Ely," she called. "He was a trade rat."

"How do you know?" asked Buck.

"Because here is Father's fountain pen, on the running board of the car just where Mother left her thimble."

## Chapter VI
## THE PANTHER: A Lassoed Lion

"So you think you would like to go lion hunting, do you?"

"Yes, sir!" said Buck.

The big man was sitting on his horse, staring down at Buck. He had just agreed to take Father and Uncle Ely with him into the wilderness searching for a mountain lion, and Buck at once asked to go.

"You understand, don't you, son, that we are not going to shoot this lion? We are going to try to bring him back alive."

"Yes, sir. I heard you telling Uncle Ely."

"Think you wouldn't get scared? You are not ten years old yet."

"No, sir! Not with you along."

The man laughed heartily. "Now that's what I call a good answer, Buck. You make me feel good, then I find it hard to say no. Well, you look strong, so if your dad thinks you can ride a horse well enough, you may go."

The man wanted a live mountain lion because he had an order for one from a city zoo. The zoo would pay him a high price for it, so he said. However, the hunt might be very dangerous. Uncle Ely and Father knew that, and Buck had to promise to be very careful. He was given a good horse, and after an early breakfast one morning the party rode away.

The big westerner who was guide for the party was named Charlie. With him were five dogs, trained especially to follow the trail of a mountain lion. They were baying and barking impatiently when the party rode out of camp that morning.

"I should think a big lion could kill a dog," Buck ventured.

"You aren't mistaking this lion for the kind you see in the circus, are you?" asked Charlie.

Uncle Ely answered for him.

"Yes, I imagine he is, Charlie. I don't know that we have ever told the children about the American lion."

"These lions, Buck, are not like the lions of Africa, such as you see at the circus. Ours are called panthers, pumas, or cougars, all names for the same animal. Ours are not as large as the African lions. Ours do not have the great shaggy mane, and are not as fierce as the others, thank goodness! That's why we can trail them with dogs. A panther might kill one dog, or even two or three, all right; but he is afraid of dogs and will usually run up a tree when dogs follow his trail. Isn't that right, Charlie?"

"Right. A panther doesn't know his own strength. Also he is something of a coward, unless he is cornered. Then he will put up a pretty good fight. A big panther will weigh two hundred pounds or more, three times what the biggest dog will weigh. He has sharp teeth and claws. We'll see."

Buck was beaming with interest at all this talk. He was going to see not a zoo lion, but a real ferocious wild American lion, just the same! Wouldn't he have something to tell his friends at home!

"Do they kill many people, Mr. Charlie?" the boy asked.

"Just call me Charlie, Buck; we are all men together on this trip. No, they never kill people. Unless a man happens to become tangled with one close up, for some reason. They do kill a lot of sheep, goats, calves, colts, even grown horses, and cows and deer. That's why all ranchers in the western country object to them. Really the lions are beautiful animals, graceful and quick as your pet cat at home. But they eat so much livestock we have to kill them when we can. They aren't as troublesome as they used to be, however."

The hunters continued talking about lions for more than an hour, moving along at a fast walk. Suddenly one of the dogs, Old Baldy, far ahead of them, gave a peculiar long yowl. Instantly Charlie was alert.

"That's lion talk!" he declared. "Old Baldy's caught the scent of lion. I know his call."

Old Baldy bayed again, and the riders spurred their horses to catch up with him. Buck was almost beside himself with excitement, but he was busy staying in his saddle, too, for the country was rough.

Soon all the dogs were on the lion trail, and the horsemen were following them as fast as they could. They had to ride over hills, jump ditches and rocks, circle canyons, and find their way among trees, but

they stayed near the dogs. After a while, the tone of the dogs' barking changed.

"Treed!" shouted Charlie.

That meant the lion had stopped running and was up in a tree. In a few minutes the hunters were on the scene. Sure enough, on a strong limb of a pine tree crouched a big tan-colored cat, snarling at the dogs and at the men. The dogs were jumping high against the trunk and barking wildly in their excitement. Everybody, even the horses, was excited. Then Charlie spoke.

"He's a big one, men! Here's where we have some fun!"

In a flash he had his lariat rope off his saddle; a loop was twirling over his head, and—swish, jerk!—the lion was lassoed.

"Pf-f-f-ft! Gr-r-r-r-r!"

The lion growled and snarled, fighting the rope.

Charlie was moving extremely fast. With one leap he was off his horse. He gave the rope a deft jerk, throwing the lion off the limb on the other side from where the men were standing. In the same instant, Charlie snubbed his end of the rope around a small tree nearby, then tied it there. In a moment the lion was dangling by the rope, hanging over the limb. The

animal was wriggling and growling furiously, but it was helpless. The dogs were barking wildly. Buck's horse reared in alarm, almost unseating its rider, because even when trained for hunting, horses are afraid of lions.

"Whoa, boy!" Charlie soothed the frightened horse, at the same time grinning at Buck and yelling to him, "Hang on tight, old timer!" Buck held on tight. He was frightened at all the noise and action. Things were happening too fast!

In another moment or two, Charlie had slipped a short rope over the lion's front paws and bound them tightly together. Then he did the same to the hind legs, and tied the great beast so firmly that it could not scratch.

Next Charlie ordered the dogs back several yards, commanding them to stay there. Then the first lariat rope was loosened, the trussed lion let down to the ground, and the hunt was over!

"Whew!" sighed Uncle Ely, loudly, "I have been in on many a roping act heretofore, but never one as fast and skillful as that, Charlie!"

"Nothing to it, if a fellow's lucky," grinned Charlie, as he slung the helpless lion to a long pole. But the other men knew better! They knew that Charlie

had shown rare nerve and bravery, to lasso and tie a grown wild mountain lion single-handed.

The horses didn't like the thought of carrying a lion home, but Charlie had them well trained. One end of the pole he tied to his saddle. The other end dragged on the ground several feet behind. The lion hung in the middle, back down, well above the ground and securely tied so it would not be injured and could do no harm. This method of packing was a trick Charlie had learned from the Indians, he said.

That was the procession Mother and Ginger saw when the tired, happy party rode into camp late that day—a live lion on a pole, and the men all grinning proudly.

When all the horses were in their corral and fed for the night, the lion safely in a cage for shipment, the dogs given food, and the people had settled down to their own hearty dinner, Ginger Blair spoke. "Oh, Mother," she said sorrowfully, "I wish I were a boy!"

## Chapter VII

## THE HORNED LIZARD: A Tiny Reptile

Several days later the Blair car and trailer were in camp near an Indian village in the sunny Southwest, a little Indian boy came near and saw Ginger. The children were on the other side of the trailer from the grown people, so that no one else saw them. The little Indian boy stared and stared at the girl.

"Hello," said Ginger, and smiled at him.

He didn't answer for a long time. He just stared. Then he began fumbling in a sack he carried. Soon his hand came out holding something which he ex-

tended to the white girl. It was a most peculiar looking something—about the size of a small leather purse, gray colored, with odd spines or horns all over it. Ginger noticed that a string was tied to it.

Suddenly the thing wiggled.

Ginger shrieked and jumped back a step. She had been about to take it in her hand!

The Indian boy stared at her all the harder. Then he put the thing down on the ground, holding one end of the string. At once it tried to run away, darting this way and that. It had four little legs, such as a lizard has, and a head much like a lizard's, too, with a crown of short, sharp horns around it. Its body was rounded, like a toad's.

"My goodness, what is it?" asked Ginger.

She moved a little closer, but she wouldn't touch the strange creature. The Indian boy picked it up and held it carefully. He extended it to Ginger again, but she was still afraid of it. Presently the boy spoke.

"Come," he said, and started away.

No one else had seen the two children, so when Ginger followed the lad, not even Mother knew where she had gone. The two went down a hill, over a low cliff and out onto a sandy flat area. Soon the little boy stopped and pointed to the ground.

"O-o-o-oh! They're babies!" Ginger was delighted. There on the ground was another of the animals, slightly bigger than her hand, and all around were a dozen or more tiny little ones no bigger than postage stamps. The babies were scurrying here and there. One would dart a few inches, then stop and cock his tiny head to look at the children. The large one, who appeared to be the mother, didn't seem much afraid. The Indian boy picked up a baby and held it out for Ginger to take in her hands. A little fearfully she accepted it.

Suddenly the baby wiggled, twisting his tiny thorny head. Ginger called out sharply and dropped it. The Indian boy laughed and gave her another one to hold.

The children watched the peculiar family for several minutes. Nearby was an ant hill. Presently the large animal ran over to the ant hill and stopped. Then the strangest thing happened—ants began to disappear! An ant would be crawling along near the creature animal, then instantly it vanished. Ginger had to watch very carefully in order to see that the animal was snapping up ants with its tongue, a motion almost too quick to see and very interesting to watch.

"What are they called? What is their name?" Ginger asked the Indian boy.

He didn't answer. He just stared at her, somewhat rudely, Ginger thought. Then he ran away and soon returned with an Indian man.

The "Mister Indian," as Ginger called him later, proved to be very friendly and spoke good English, so that Ginger could understand him. He was dressed in dark clothing, wore a belt of silver ornaments, and around his forehead was tied a bright red band. Soon he was holding Ginger on one knee and the little boy on the other.

"People call these horned toads," he explained, "but they are really lizards that have grown spread out and flat. The white teacher in our school told us so. Our people have known about them for many years. We do not harm them, for they do no harm to people, and they are interesting to watch."

"What do they eat?" Ginger asked.

"Ants, mostly. They will eat other small things such as bugs and flies and crickets."

"I never saw one before."

"Where is your *hogan* (ho'gan), little white girl?"

Ginger looked at him questioningly.

"I mean, where is your home?" The man smiled.

"*Hogan* is our word for home. Where do you live?"

"Oh, away back in an eastern state, many miles from here."

"Then you do not have these horned lizards. They live in the sandy country of the Southwest, in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They love the warm sand. At night they burrow into the sand and flip it over their backs to cover themselves, so they can sleep well. In winter time they stay burrowed day and night, waiting for the warm spring sunshine."

"Oh, yes, the bears do that, too."

"Yes. I see you are a wise little white girl. How do you happen to be in our Indian village?"

Then all at once Ginger remembered that she had left camp without telling anyone where to find her. She had just strayed away with the little Indian boy. Hastily she bade her new friends good-by and ran back up the cliff over the hill.

When the family saw her, they all came running.

"Where have you been?" shouted Buck. "Everyone has been looking and looking for you. We were very much frightened."

Then Ginger told them all about her adventure, and took Buck and Uncle Ely back to see the horned lizards. The Indians were gone, however.

"Uncle Ely, I forgot to ask Mister Indian one thing that I want to know."

"What, Ginger?"

"Why does the little animal have horns?"

"They are just to frighten enemies. The horns are too small and too short to do any real harm. But you will note that this fellow looks quite fierce when he bows his neck and shows fight. Thus he can scare away many animals that would harm him. Were you afraid of the first one you saw?"

Now Ginger didn't want to tell a lie, but then Buck had been boasting about the lion hunt, on which he had gone with the men. So she just pretended to be very much astonished at Uncle Ely's question, and merely asked, "Who? *Me* afraid?"

She winked at Uncle Ely, and he winked back.

## Chapter VIII

## THE JACK RABBIT: A Long-Eared Jumper

"Today," said Uncle Ely, "I am going to introduce you two eastern children to a famous westerner. At least I shall try to. He may be hard to find, but perhaps not."

The country about them was called a desert, but it was not barren as true deserts are. It had many mesquite, ironwood, and palo verde trees, cactus plants, and wild flowers adding their splashes of green and dots of reds and yellows to the landscape. The

softer reds and browns of great boulders added still more beauty, and the purplish-red mountains, hazy in the distance, made a lovely background for it all. Uncle Ely, speaking softly, had been pointing out these things, encouraging the children to enjoy the outdoors. The three were walking quietly. Then Buck stumbled on a root and fell right into a bush.

Instantly something moved nearby—thump! bumpety-bumpety-bumpety—making a running sound that quickly faded away.

"O—oh!" said Ginger, very much startled.

Leaping and running away from them at a truly astonishing speed was a gray animal almost as tall as a dog.

It seemed to jump more than it ran. When it came to a bush, it just leaped over, never hesitating. Its legs were very long.

Everyone stared for several seconds, even after the animal had disappeared in the distance.

"My goodness!" Ginger exclaimed under her breath. But Uncle Ely answered now.

"That, children, was the westerner I spoke of. Did you notice?"

"Yes! Yes, sir, I surely did!" Buck was excited about it. "He had the longest ears I have ever seen

on any animal. Why, they were *that* long, Uncle Ely!" He measured halfway up his arm.

"And they stood up high!" Ginger added. "Goodness, what does he do with such ears? And how fast he can run!"

"He listens for danger with them," Uncle Ely explained. "He can hear you long before you come near him. I am surprised that we got as close to him as we did. Probably that was because we had been very quiet."

"I thought at first it was a rabbit," said Buck, "but he seemed too big for a rabbit. Could he have been a giant rabbit, Uncle Ely?"

"That's not a bad guess, Buck. As a matter of fact, he was a kind of giant rabbit and, strictly speaking, jack rabbits are hares and not rabbits. He is a jack rabbit, but I'm sure his ears weren't quite as long as you thought. I have seen hundreds of them, been very close to them. Their ears are about as long as my hand—six or eight inches, perhaps."

"They look longer."

"Yes, they do. But a jack rabbit's legs are more important than his ears, I think. With his leaping and running, he can flee from dogs, wolves, foxes, lions, anything that might give chase. I have seen

few dogs that could catch a jack rabbit. On the open prairie, where there isn't any brush, I have even chased jack rabbits on my horse. But I never caught one."

The children next began to stir up the bushes and tufts of grass around them. Uncle Ely had suggested that there might be some young jack rabbits.

Ginger looked and looked and looked, and Buck peered here and there and everywhere, but they found no nest. They were about ready to continue their hike when Uncle Ely quietly pointed back toward the trail over which they had been walking. "See?" he asked.

Both children stared. "No. What is it?" Buck whispered, still looking.

Quietly Uncle Ely came to them, knelt beside them and pointed. "Right under a corner of that rock," he whispered, "with the clump of dried grass almost screening them from us. See now?"

The children looked carefully for a moment, then, "O-o-oh, yes, sir! Bunnies! Baby jack rabbits, aren't they, Uncle Ely?"

"That's right. But they know we have seen them. They won't be there long. They will—*there they go!*"

Even as he spoke, two little furry gray fellows,

each with comical long ears and long legs, sprang out like bouncing rubber balls. In a twinkling they had leaped away, and could be seen no more.

"We were lucky to see them," Uncle Ely then said. "Baby jacks are smart fellows. They can find food and take care of themselves when they are no more than a week old, and when a month old they can run like lightning. However, when danger is near, Nature teaches them to stay hidden as long as they dare. The old jacks will run at once, when an enemy appears; the babies will hide, because they know that they are little and can be caught more easily. But when the moment comes—*zip!* and they are gone, too, just as we saw."

"Are there always twin babies?" asked Ginger.

"No. The parents will have from one to six in a family."

"What do jack rabbits eat, Uncle Ely?"

"Almost any kind of plant. They especially like to eat green vegetables in our gardens, such as cabbages and lettuce. Sometimes, in the southwestern country, they become so numerous that they destroy much garden growth, and farmers have to shoot them. More often, however, it is the owls, foxes and larger wild beasts that try to slip up on jack to catch

and eat him. Every wild thing has its natural enemy. Come on, let's hike some more. We will probably see half a dozen jack rabbits before we return."

## Chapter IX

## THE COYOTE: A Wild Dog

"Look, there's a dog!"

Ginger Blair pointed through the sedan window. The family was riding through a level country, far from any towns or homes. Ginger had seen the animal calmly sitting down not many yards from the highway.

"He must be lost," Bill Buck suggested. "Maybe he's hungry."

Father was driving, and he already had slowed down. Everyone was looking at the dog, and the dog was looking at the people, his tongue hanging out and his breath panting, for all the world like the children's pet dog at home. Father brought the car to a stop.

"It's a dog, all right," Uncle Ely spoke up now. "But it is not the kind of dog you think."

"Looks like a police dog, Uncle Ely," Buck declared. "See his ears, straight up? And his gray and tan hair? But he's not grown. I'll bet somebody lost him out of a car. Shame, to lose him! He's just a puppy, not half-grown!"

"He's grown, all right." Uncle Ely was slowly getting out of his seat. "You needn't feel sorry for him. He is not suffering from hunger. He is too smart for that. We have seen half a dozen rabbits and several other little animals in the last few miles, you'll remember. That dog isn't hungry."

"Maybe he is a city dog, somebody's pet that doesn't know how to hunt," suggested Mother.

"No. He is not a pet. I know him. His kind is common on our Texas ranches. He roams all over the American West, and down into Mexico. This is truly a western animal, and one that has been wise

enough to live and multiply in spite of the coming of man. Man has shot him and trapped him and poisoned him for years, but still his family lives on. Man has killed off many animals, so that they are hard to find now, but not this fellow."

"What kind of dog is he, Uncle Ely? A police dog?" Buck was greatly interested. The entire family was watching the beast.

"A barking dog, having the scientific name of *latrans*. But he is generally known by his Spanish name—coyote."

"O-o-h, is that a coyote?" Mother exclaimed. "I have heard of them and read about them all my life!"

"That's a coyote," Uncle Ely repeated. "Smartest wild fellow in the West, I would say. He is a famous wild dog."

The coyote had moved from his sitting position. He trotted a few feet, then paused to stare at the people again, as if very curious about them. He did indeed look just like a young police dog, except that his nose was thinner, and very pointed. He moved gracefully. His tail was fluffy and pretty, but it drooped low.

"If he is wild, why isn't he afraid of us, Uncle Ely?" asked Ginger.

"He is peculiar that way. He seems to have a strange knowledge of man. If we had stepped out of the car with a gun, he would have disappeared in a streak, running faster than any pet dog you ever saw. He seems to have an unusually keen sense of smell, and has learned that the gun smell means danger. But he also seems to be very curious about man, and will prowl around a camp, or sit on a hill near a tent or a home and howl at night. He is both wild and wary."

"What does he eat?"

"Rabbits, gophers, chipmunks, prairie marmots, any animal he can catch. Ranchers shoot him because he steals calves, lambs, and chickens at times. He and his kind have been known to slay deer and antelope also. Coyotes hunt in pairs, usually. They do most of their hunting in twilight or at night. Some people say they are cowards, but this isn't true. A coyote will run if a man with a gun and trained hunting dogs take after him, but he would be foolish not to run. If one tame dog attacks him, a coyote will probably kill him. He is a good fighter."

Uncle Ely had been speaking in a low tone, as the family watched the animal. They were very quiet so as not to frighten the wild dog away. Then suddenly the sound of a gunshot came from a distance.

Instantly the coyote jumped ahead, and before anyone could speak he was fading away in the distance. When the family turned to look, a cowboy on a horse was seen riding toward them.

"Howdy, folks," he called cheerily. "Had to take a long range crack at that coyote. Knew I couldn't get any closer, likely. He can tell when a fellow has a gun. But I missed him. Just found a young calf killed by coyotes on our ranch this morning, so I'm gunning for the dogs."

"I know how it is," Uncle Ely said. "I'm a rancher, too, down in Texas."

"Texas, eh? We-ll, you got plenty of 'em there. I'll be ridin' on. So long."

The cowboy's horse galloped easily away and nothing more was seen of the coyote. The Blairs got back in their car and started off.

Presently Ginger spoke. "Does the wild dog have puppies, Uncle Ely?"

"Certainly. They're the cutest little pups you ever saw. Six or seven at a time. They usually make a den in a cave or a hidden hollow. The mother and father coyotes teach the pups to hunt. If you discover the den while the pups are young, the coyote family will move away. They don't trust man."

Ginger sighed before she spoke again. "My, my!" she said. "It seems as though the people don't trust the animals, and the animals don't trust the people, everywhere we go."

"That's very true, Ginger," said Uncle Ely, kindly. "You are a bright little girl to notice it. All animals seem to fear other animals and fight with them. That is Nature's plan, and some people call it the struggle for the survival of the fittest."

## Chapter X

## THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIGHORN: A Bold Mountaineer

Buck Blair was enjoying the scenery, studying it closely with powerful field glasses, when he suddenly called, "Uncle Ely! Come and look!"

Ginger came to see also, her curiosity aroused.

"Found a bear, Buck?" asked Uncle Ely.

"No, sir. It doesn't look much like a bear. But it's a big thing, walking up the mountain over yonder. You look—up among those high red rocks."

The three travelers had ridden high up a western mountainside that day, to a cabin where they were to spend the night. Their horses were already safe in a corral, and the elderly man and woman who lived in the cabin had promised that supper would be ready in an hour.

The visitors were delighted to find that the place was actually above the clouds! Cloud ships floated over the lower mountain tops below them to the south. But one or two peaks and a ridge to the north were even higher than the cabin.

Uncle Ely whistled in surprise after he took the field glasses.

"Sa-a-a-ay, this *is* something, Buck!" he exclaimed. "Why, that's a bighorn! A real wild Rocky Mountain sheep. They are hard to find now."

The two children each had a long look at the distant animal, brought very close by the powerful field glasses. But presently it passed out of view behind shrubbery and rocks. Try as they would, they could see it no more.

"You may never see another one, children," Uncle

Ely told them. "Even before most of the bighorns were killed, they were rather hard to see, because they lived mainly in the high mountain country. Not many of them are left now."

"Could we look for one tomorrow anyway, Uncle Ely?"

"Surely! But come in the cabin now; I want to show you something."

While they waited—not too patiently—for the meal to cook, the three studied a hunter's trophy that hung over the cabin fireplace.

It was an amazing thing, really, a huge animal's head which closely resembled the somewhat ugly face of an ordinary sheep. But—the horns of the animal certainly were not ordinary!

"Goodness! He's all horns!" said Ginger.

They did not stick up like a cow's horns, or branch into several points like those of a deer. Starting as great thick growths from the beast's forehead, they at once curved up, back, sideways, down, then up again—one horn on each side of the head, massive and strong.

"They almost make a complete circle, don't they?" said Billy Buck, awed by their size and shape.

"That's right," Uncle Ely agreed. "And here's

something to remember. A wild sheep is the only wild animal that does have circling horns."

The three travelers slept so soundly that night, in the high mountain air, that they dreamed of nothing and heard nothing until well after dawn. Breakfast was waiting, and their horses already saddled for them, when they did crawl out of bed. Uncle Ely agreed to do as both children requested—ride over to the next mountain peak, and see if the trail of the bighorn could be found.

"With luck we might—just might—be able to see one of them again," he agreed.

The riding was slow, for the trails soon disappeared among rocks and scrubby growth. Not many trees were up this high, although quantities of them could be seen on the sweep of the mountains below. Tired of riding, the three Blairs tethered their horses and walked on for a half hour.

They were moving, single file, along a narrow mountain ledge. One misstep would have sent them tumbling hundreds of feet down a steep rocky slope, but it was safe enough if one were careful. The children agreed that it was a thrilling place to hike. Buck was in the lead. Suddenly he halted, too startled to speak; while Ginger gasped.

Even Uncle Ely's mouth popped open in surprise.

They had rounded a corner in the rocky trail—and were face to face with a bighorn ram! Moreover, just beyond him was a ewe, and behind her were two or three more of the animals.

The animals were as startled as the people. Nevertheless, things happened fast.

Uttering a strange noise—a sort of baaa and snort combined—the big ram jumped back. His move warned the other animals.

With truly amazing speed, then, all of them left the trail. Down, down they jumped—seeming almost to fly, yet touching and sliding and leaping down the rocky slope. How they kept their footing no one could ever say. People, horses, cows, mules, anything but a wild sheep or wild goat would surely have stumbled and fallen to death.

But while Uncle Ely and Buck and Ginger stood motionless with interest and surprise, these remarkable beasts did the impossible. In fewer seconds than it takes to tell, the bighorns had disappeared. Not until then could the children even breathe again.

"Whee-e-e-eeew!" whistled Buck, turning to look up at Uncle Ely.

"Me, too, Buck! That's something we won't forget!"

Ginger could only stare at the two others, and at the spot where the animals had been. The three sat down there on the high, narrow trail, to rest and talk about it.

"We needed a moving-picture camera," said Uncle Ely. "But we would have been too excited to use it, I suppose. Wasn't he a picture? I believe his horns were bigger than those down in the cabin."

"Yes!" both children agreed.

"Well, anyhow, children, you have seen something not many people ever will see. A family of Rocky Mountain bighorns, on their native heath. I've heard of them all my life, seen pictures of them, talked to hunters who killed them years ago. But I never expected to meet a pair of horns like that, face to face."

"An-an-and I d-don't want to again, either!" declared Buck, heartily.

Ginger and Uncle Ely laughed out loud, and Buck joined them.

"I imagine the ram was as frightened as we were," said Uncle Ely, "and I never heard of one attacking a man. It is a fact, however, that he can show a good fight to anything else he is likely to meet. An old trapper once told me of seeing a short fight between a bighorn and a grizzly bear."

"Which won?" asked Buck quickly.

"Neither. The bighorn butted hard, and so fast that the bear was taken by surprise at first. But then the grizzly got mad and knocked the ram down with one terrific blow. After that they called a truce, each respectful of the other. Probably the grizzly would have won, if they had kept on fighting."

"I bet it was fun to watch," said Buck.

Ginger shuddered a little at the thought. She still remembered how frightening the big ram had been when they met him unexpectedly.

"These sheep grow to weigh three hundred pounds or more," Uncle Ely continued, "but that's not nearly as much as a grizzly bear might weigh. On the other hand, it is about as much as a big mountain lion weighs. I am told that the mountain lion respects the wild sheep's horns."

"Then what is the bighorn's chief enemy, Uncle Ely?" asked Ginger. "You said that almost every animal was preyed on by some other."

"The wild sheep's chief enemy is the eagle."

"The eagle?" Both children were indeed surprised. How could a mere bird, even though a large one, hurt so large and ferocious a thing as a Rocky Mountain bighorn?

"Yes, sir, the eagle," Uncle Ely declared. "I don't mean that eagles attack grown sheep. But eagles do carry off many little lambs. Eagles fly around the mountain tops, where these wild sheep live. A baby lamb is a dainty bit for the eagle family to eat, so the big bird will swoop down, pick up the baby, and be gone with it. Of course, the mother sheep would fight, but the eagle appears unexpectedly, and quickly flies beyond her reach. All the mother ewe can do is to hide her lamb and guard it as best she can."

Billy Buck took a deep breath, thrilled again at the true story of drama in the wilderness. Every time Uncle Ely took the children out in the fields or forests, it seemed, they learned new facts about conflict, danger, and excitement among Nature's wild creatures. Buck stared down the steep rocky slope where the bighorn family had fled a few minutes before.

"I can't understand why they weren't all killed," he said.

"Nor I," agreed Uncle Ely, "except that they are such expert climbers and jumpers. They have learned to be so by long years of training, because of the rough country where they live. There are several kinds of these wild sheep with the great circular

horns. Although scarce now, they once were common all the way from Mexico in the south to Alaska in the far north. They have always lived in the mountains, near the tops of mountains, where the scenery is grandest and the scrubby leaves and grass grow more to their liking. I think we may always regard the bighorn as America's finest mountaineer."

## Chapter XI

## THE SKUNK: A Fearless Enemy

"Gather some dry wood for the campfire, children," Father called to Buck and Ginger. The family had stopped for the night, although the sun was not yet down. They were far from any town.

Presently, from a distance, came Buck's call.

"Un-cle E-e-e-ly!"

"Yes!" Uncle Ely shouted back.

"Come quickly, here is a strange animal."

"What is it?"

"A cat! A beautiful kitty!" Ginger called out.

"Does it have a white stripe down its back?" Uncle Ely was highly interested now.

"Yes, sir, it does." The children answered together.

Uncle Ely laughed. Then he spoke to Mother as he walked away, "Better get out some fresh clothing for the children, Mary," he grinned at her. "They'll need it."

Soon he was standing beside Buck and Ginger.

"There are a mother and three babies," whispered Buck. "They don't act wild at all, Uncle Ely. Maybe I could catch them. They saw us, and they didn't run."

Uncle Ely was sniffing. "You both all right?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. Why?"

"Well, you're lucky. I really don't smell a thing. Not yet. Guess you didn't disturb them. I have told you to be quiet around strange animals, and it's a good thing you took my advice."

"Why, Uncle Ely?"

"That's not a cat and kittens, Ginger," Uncle Ely explained. "That's a very beautiful animal with a very ugly name—a skunk. Those are her babies. Baby skunks. They have fine fur."

"Will they harm us?"

"Not if you let them alone. But if you should even threaten one—goodness!"

Buck was not afraid. The animals were too small, and his little sister was there, anyway. He always liked to be her protector.

"Shall I get a stick and frighten them away, Uncle Ely?" Buck asked.

"They will not run, Buck. They will lift their tails and let you run."

The children stared at Uncle Ely, questioningly. He had a twinkle in his eyes, yet he was serious, too.

"I mean it," Uncle Ely declared. "Skunks are not afraid of anything, not even of big bears, dogs, lions, or of man. You noticed that they paid very little attention to you, when every other creature would have fled at once."

"Yes, sir; but—"

Uncle Ely motioned the children to sit down.

"Just be quiet and watch them," he continued. "See, the mother is leading her babies slowly away now. They are nosing in the grass for mice, grasshoppers, or other bits to eat. But if you disturb them the strangest thing will happen. They will shower you with a terrible gas!"

"Gas?"

"Yes, indeed, gas. Just under each skunk's tail are two very small nipples. From them the animal can

squirt a spoonful or so of yellowish liquid. When he lifts his tail and squats ever so slightly, he can squirt it as far as fifteen feet.

"This liquid comes out in a fine spray, and instantly turns to vapor. Then it is somewhat like gas from your cookstove at home, except that it smells much worse. *Much* worse! It is the worst-smelling odor in the world, I suppose."

Buck and Ginger were staring in wonder.

"Is it poisonous?" Buck asked. "Like war gas?"

"No, not quite that bad. It could put out your eyes, or even suffocate you if you were in a small cave or hollow log with it. But it just smells! Its smell is so very unpleasant that all other animals fear it. It lingers for days, if it gets on your clothing or body. The skunk has long ago learned that other animals will let it alone, if it merely squirts out a bit of gas, so it doesn't try to fight or run. It doesn't have to. That's what I meant by lifting their tails and letting you run. Come on; it is best to go away from them and let them alone. If they try to squirt us, we may have to move our entire camp."

With Buck holding one hand and Ginger the other, the big outdoor man led them back to the car and trailer. He sat down in his folding chair.

"Would they come here to our camp, Uncle Ely?" Ginger was a little worried.

"Not likely. If they do, let them. It might even be possible to catch them and handle them gently, with no harm done. Once I saw some boys in a camp capture a skunk family and make pets of the animals. Nobody ever smelled the scent, until a curious dog came up barking one day. Then everybody smelled it!"

The children laughed at that. Even Mother and Father smiled.

"Where do they live? I mean, where is their nest?" asked Ginger.

"Oh, in a log or burrow somewhere. They hibernate in winter, as bears do; make a bed in some protected hole and sleep until spring. One burrow may have two or three families of skunks, all piled up together, snug and warm."

"And smelly," suggested Buck.

"Maybe," admitted Uncle Ely, "but not much. They don't have to throw out their awful smell unless they want to. It is just a means of protection. Nature gave some animals sharp teeth and claws with which to fight; to some she gave speed, so they could run from danger; to some she gave protective color-

ing, so they could hide easily. But Nature gave the skunk none of these. She gave the skunk that strange chemical weapon, but it is enough. Only a few barn owls, and an occasional wild dog will brave the odor in order to eat a skunk."

The children looked doubtful, as if they didn't fully understand. Buck spoke, "I just don't see how an unpleasant odor can be good protection," said the boy.

"Best way is to learn for yourselves," Uncle Ely admitted. "Go throw a stick at the skunks. Don't get too close. But come back and let me know what you think."

The children ran off, delighted to look further into this interesting matter. It was nearly an hour before they returned.

Nobody said anything to them at first. Everyone was quietly eating supper, but the three grown people were smiling ever so little. Nobody even mentioned the skunks again until bedtime. Then Ginger poked her head out the trailer window and called from her bunk, "Uncle Ely, you were right about the skunks. They're *awful!*"

## Chapter XII

## THE GILA MONSTER: An Arizona Stranger

The Blair automobile and trailer pulled to a stop beside the road in southern Arizona. Great cactus trees, leafless but covered with thorns, were thick on every side.

Father Blair had been driving, and he got out to stretch his legs. He hadn't gone twenty feet when something caught his eye.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

"Did you call?" Mother asked from the trailer.

"Why, no. I mean, yes, I did. I've found something. Looks like an alligator with an Indian rug on his back!"

"What *are* you talking about?" Mother demanded. Buck and Ginger bounced out of the car and ran to Father's side.

"Hold on, now," Father warned. "This may be a kiwolopus. Better go easy until we know. See him there in the sand?"

"O-o-o-o-oh!" breathed Ginger, staring.

"What's a kiwolopus, Daddy?" Buck asked.

"Any kind of animal whose name you don't know. It's just a make-believe word."

"Then you don't know what that is?" Ginger was anxious.

"No," said Father, "I do not. Fortunately, we have Ely with us. He is the animal man on this trip. Oh, E-ly!"

Uncle Ely had heard the talking, and now he came to look at the beast. He stared at it a moment, threw a pebble at it, and grunted a little to himself.

"Um, hum," he mumbled. "Some kind of baby alligator, or something. But I never heard of one with colors like that."

Buck was excited.

"Yes, sir! Look. It has tiny black and orange beads all over it. They're in a strange design."

"Doesn't look long enough for an alligator, Uncle Ely," Ginger suggested.

"I'll bet it's some sort of reptile. It has legs like a lizard, and it's about as long as my forearm." Uncle Ely was studying the creature.

"It doesn't run away fast, as a lizard would do," Mother suggested this. The animal was moving very sluggishly, seeming to pay no attention to the people.

The group devoted some time to poking the animal with sticks, pitching sand on it, and trying to make it run or fight. Mother and Ginger were afraid of it. Its face was horrible-looking, they declared, although the beaded pattern of its back was oddly beautiful.

"Moves too lazily for any lizard," Uncle Ely sounded as if he were talking to himself. "Too fat and stubby, too. No water within many miles of here, so it can't be some kind of alligator. Besides, it's not shaped like an alligator at all."

"What'll we do about it, Uncle Ely?" Buck asked.

"Well, Buck, I told you to ask questions whenever you didn't know, or didn't understand something. I intend to take my own advice."

"But there is nobody near us. How can you ask anybody?"

"I shall put the reptile in a box or bag and take him into the state capital. That's Phoenix, the next city. We can find somebody there who knows what he is."

Mother was alarmed at this.

"He can't ride with me!" she announced firmly.

The two men smiled at her, and Uncle Ely explained that he would keep the strange animal safely in a box right beside him, and Mother could ride in another seat.

It was three hours later that the Blairs rolled into the city of Phoenix. Uncle Ely asked about the schools there. He learned that a Mr. Wilson in the high school was a science teacher who knew all about the animals of Arizona. Soon the beaded fellow had been placed on Mr. Wilson's lawn.

"You wouldn't know much about him, probably," said the teacher, "because he lives only in Arizona and Mexico. He is the only poisonous lizard in the world. You were wise not to try to handle him. We call him the Gila Monster, because he is common along the Gila River. That's where you were when you found him.

"He is not quick to strike, as is a rattlesnake, for instance; and he does not have fangs that inject poison as a rattler's do. But poison flows from his lower jaw and may easily infect any wound his teeth make. A few people have been killed by Gila Monsters, and others have been bitten without suffering harm."

Buck and Ginger asked many questions about the odd lizard. They learned that he eats such things as birds' eggs and mice, and that nobody is quite sure why he has a peculiar beaded pattern on his skin. The design is, as Father said in the beginning, somewhat like that of a Navajo Indian rug. They learned that Gila is pronounced "*Hee-lah*," because it is a Spanish name. G in Spanish is sounded like the English H, I like E.

"Mr. Wilson, I'd like to take one of these home," Uncle Ely said. "He is interesting enough to have—"

Mother spoke up at once, however.

"Ely Blair, you will not take that thing another mile in this car or trailer! If you do, I will walk the rest of the way!"

Ginger slipped her hand into her mother's, looked up at her and smiled.

"I will walk with you, Mother," she said, while everyone laughed.

## Chapter XIII

## THE PELICAN AND THE GULLS:
### A Strange Rivalry

"Billy Bu-u-u-u-uck!"

Ginger Blair screamed in fright. Buck, playing on the other side of a huge rock, thought she must have fallen into the ocean. This was the family's first day at the seashore, after two weeks of motoring. Buck ran as fast as he could.

"What's the matter, Sister? What is it?" The waves were a little rough on this stretch of seacoast, but Ginger wore her bathing suit and the water wasn't over her head for a long way out. Buck could see nothing to alarm her at first.

"I don't know," she answered him, "only it had a mouth as long as my arm, and a suitcase hanging under it, and it stared at me, and it had big wings, and I'm sure he flew at me, and—"

Uncle Ely had heard Ginger scream also, and had come running.

"Are you talking about the pelican?" Uncle Ely asked. "The big fellow that just flew away?"

"Y-yes, sir. He looked so queer, and—"

Uncle Ely chuckled at her. "I don't blame you for being scared a little. But a pelican won't hurt anybody. He is one of the friendliest birds we have."

"But he flew at me, Uncle Ely!"

"He just wanted to see what you were doing. Perhaps he saw a fish in the water near you. He's a great fisherman. He has better luck than I have at fishing."

"Does he use a hook?" asked Ginger.

Buck glared at her, because he knew better than to ask such a question.

"No," Uncle Ely grinned. "He uses a dip net.

That's what the long pouch under his bill is. That suitcase, as you call it, can hold six or eight good-sized fish. He stores them there until he is ready to swallow them, or he takes them to the young birds in his nest."

"Where do pelicans make their nests?"

"High in trees, or sometimes on a cliff, near the seashore. Let's sit quietly here in the shade, and watch those two yonder."

The two pelicans seemed to be staring at the man and children for a long time. Then one of them flapped away. He was truly an immense bird, apparently as large as a young turkey. His bill and pouch made him appear queer, and his neck was curved like the letter S.

He flew gracefully, almost touching the water, dipping down in the troughs of the big waves and rising over their crests. Suddenly he made a quick splash. He had seen a fish near the surface of the water and dipped it into his great beak.

The second pelican saw the catch, so he promptly flew over that way also. This one's beak-pouch was nearly full, because it was hanging down more. Nevertheless, he hovered over the waves a moment, and then dived into the water also.

By chance, however, a sea gull saw that last bit of fishing. A gull is much the smaller bird, resembling a duck. When he saw the pelican catch the fish, he made a cry that sounded like a wild scream.

In a moment several other gulls appeared and quickly they all circled about the great pelican. The pelican flew back toward the shore, fortunately right near the spot where the children and Uncle Ely were crouching.

The gulls were screaming and darting at the bigger bird, pecking at him, and doing all they could to annoy him.

He tried to fly away, but they headed him back, circling around him in the air, making a penetrating noise with their voices and flapping wings. He dodged, but he couldn't get away. More gulls came, and soon a dozen or more were annoying him.

Finally, he could stand it no longer, so the pelican opened his great "suitcase mouth" and out dropped all the fish. Buck and Ginger counted them, or tried to. Buck counted seven, and Ginger thought she saw eight or nine. Uncle Ely wasn't sure, either, but he did notice that the fish were all longer than his hand.

As the fish fell out, the gulls darted after them instantly. Most of them were caught in the air before

they could even fall to the sand. Two or three birds would catch the same fish, then engage in a noisy squabbling over it until one could snatch it and fly away. It was very exciting to watch, but it made the children angry too.

"That was mean!" exclaimed Ginger.

"Seems like it," agreed Uncle Ely. "And yet, I don't know. The pelican can catch more fish. Probably he had been too greedy."

"He shouldn't carry his fish around with him too long, if he wants to keep them," suggested Buck. "A man doesn't carry a lot of money, you said, Uncle Ely, because someone might steal it. And pirates used to raid treasure ships."

"Now that's an idea! Maybe the pelican was careless. He must have known the gulls were pirates. Anyway, we have just seen a friendly, harmless old bird have his treasures taken away from him by a flock of gulls. Wasn't that interesting?"

"Yes!" agreed both children with enthusiasm.

"However, don't hold the idea that gulls are nothing but thieves. They are really very fine birds, good friends of man. The pelican can avoid them when he really tries. Mother Nature usually arranges those things properly."

"I think Mother Nature is very wise, don't you, Uncle Ely?"

"Yes, Buck. Far, far wiser than most people ever imagine she is."

## Chapter XIV

## THE EAGLE: Majestic Sky King

Sometimes when people are traveling for days on end, it is hard to amuse themselves. All kinds of make-believe games must be played as they skim along the highways, because they grow tired of looking at the scenery, and tired of talking. Buck and Ginger and the others of the Blair family found this so.

"Let's ask riddles," Ginger suggested one after-

noon. "Can't you ask us some animal riddles, Uncle Ely?"

Uncle Ely thought for a moment.

"What bird has his picture in more places than any other bird?" he then asked.

Nobody answered for a moment. Everyone was trying to think.

"Bluebird," said Mother.

"No."

"Dove," said Ginger. "It is in my Bible."

"No."

"Mockingbird?"

"No."

The children began talking to themselves. "What *can* it be?"

"You have pictures of it in your pocket right now, Buck," said Uncle Ely.

"Who? *I* have? Why, I haven't! I haven't any pictures in my pockets."

"Yes, you have! Show me everything in your right-hand trousers pocket."

Buck pulled out a penknife, a dried pine cone, some brightly colored rocks, two rubber bands, two sticks of chewing gum, a nickel, a quarter, and a silver dollar that Father had given him.

"There, see? I win!" Uncle Ely pointed.

"I don't see any picture of a bird."

"Look on that silver dollar. There's an eagle!"

"O-o-o-o!" breathed Buck and Ginger together, staring at the coin. "Yes, sir, it is. I never thought of that!"

The riddle led to a long talk. Uncle Ely reminded the children that there are millions of coins in use that have the American eagle on them. Right away everybody, even Mother, wanted to know all about the American eagle. Mother remembered that his picture appears on the United States official coat-of-arms and has been our American symbol for many years, but she didn't know much about the wild bird himself.

"He prefers to live near lakes," said Uncle Ely. "We will try to see one, for our map indicates that we are coming to a fine wilderness region with several lakes, and perhaps the hunters haven't killed all the birds. Eagles like the seacoast, too."

"Do eagles swim like ducks, Uncle Ely?" asked Buck.

"No. No, I didn't mean that. I mean they live near water because the food they like most is fish. An eagle can see a fish near the surface of the water,

and suddenly dart down to catch it in his great claws, callen talons.

"Sometimes he will see another bird, such as an osprey, with a fish in its claws, and will attack this smaller bird. The osprey may be flying very high, but he will drop his fish to flee, knowing that the eagle is a dangerous enemy. At once the eagle dives like a bullet, catches the fish in the air, and flies off to his nest or some other secluded place to eat it."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Ginger.

"Then the eagle is a thief!" Buck declared.

"Yes, in a way. But Nature made him that way, remember. After all, the osprey had taken the fish from its water home. In one sense, you steal a calf from its mother when you butcher it for food. It is Nature's plan for some animals to prey on others."

Buck was staring at the picture of the bird on his silver dollar.

"He looks fierce, all right," he remarked. "What kind of an eagle is he, Uncle Ely?"

"We call him the Bald Eagle. Actually he is not bald. His head and neck feathers, and those on his tail, are snow-white. If you see this bird sitting high on a tree, his head looks like frosted silver, and when he flies he has a wide wingspread and he moves with

slow and powerful strokes. Often he seems to float through the air.

"He doesn't get his white feathers until he is four years old. Therefore, as a young bird he is easily mistaken for his kinsman, the Golden Eagle, whose feathers are dark brown."

Father Blair had a question at this point.

"You say he just *looks* bald, Ely, and really isn't bald? Then we have misnamed him, haven't we?"

"Certainly have, Bob. Ought to be named Silver Eagle, or something like that. However, I suppose American Eagle is his real name."

"That's right," agreed Father. "I hope we will see one. How big is he, and where does he nest?"

"Why, as I recall, American eagles grow to be about three feet tall, taller than a turkey. Their wings may spread as much as seven or eight feet; thus you can see how an eagle might carry off a lamb or other small animal. They prefer fish, however."

"Usually these eagles nest in high trees, along the seacoast or near a lake. Sometimes the nest is on a cliff ledge. The nest may be as large as six feet across and six feet high, made of a wagon load of sticks and rubbish. The female Bald eagle will lay two dull white eggs. Her eaglets are brave little fellows who

eat the fish and other game the parent birds bring. They tear it to pieces with their sharp claws and curved beaks."

After the Blair family had made camp at the end of that day, Uncle Ely and the children looked long at the sky for eagles, but they saw only one, soaring very high. They watched often during the following week there, without further success. Uncle Ely was very much disappointed. He knew that thoughtless men have been shooting eagles for many years, so that these birds are very hard to find, although once they were to be seen in every part of our country.

The American eagle has been called the sky king, because he is such a large, strong bird that he can rule the air. He flies high over mountains and valleys, and his castle nest is high in the air. He has few enemies, except man.

At the end of their week at the wilderness lake, Uncle Ely suddenly had an idea.

"Children," he called to Buck and Ginger, "I forgot to tell you one thing about the eagle. We have a United States coin named for him. It is made of gold. We don't see this coin outside of banks very often, but we call it an 'eagle,' and it is worth ten dollars."

## Chapter XV
## THE BEAVER: Chief Gnawer

One morning, in the same forest where the Blairs had seen the eagle, Buck and Ginger hiked half a mile from their camp to an icy stream. But when they came to a small pond with some very strange things in it, the children hastened back to camp.

"Uncle Ely, we found some Eskimo houses in water!" Ginger exclaimed.

"Anyhow they looked like Eskimo houses," Buck added. "They were made of mud and sticks, and

they were round. One of them was as big as—nearly as big as our trailer, wasn't it, Sister?"

"Yes," Ginger agreed.

"Seems as though we ought to go and see them," suggested Uncle Ely, and so the three started back to the pond. Father Blair had overheard the conversation, so he went with them.

"Probably those water houses are where the beaver and his family live," Uncle Ely explained as they walked. "An Indian once told me that his people had a special name for the beaver. The name was Chief Gnawer, because this animal can gnaw down trees for food, and for building dams and houses. But let's not forget to be quiet as we come near the pond."

"I remember about beavers," Father spoke in a low tone to the group. "Used to see them when we were boys, remember, Ely? They made dams of their logs, and made houses of the smaller limbs and sticks. They certainly can gnaw, all right. They eat the bark of the trees they cut down."

"Why do they eat bark, Daddy?" asked Buck. "I didn't know anything would eat tree bark."

"Oh, yes. Because they like it, I suppose, and it is nourishing for them. They do not eat bark from just any tree, do they, Ely? I believe they eat only the

barks that are juicy and tender, such as poplar, cottonwood, aspen, elm, birch, and willow. They won't eat hickory and oak, I know."

"That's right," Uncle Ely agreed.

"Well, I want to see a beaver," Ginger said.

"So do I," said Buck.

The four waited for a long time, but when Mother finally tooted the car horn for them they still hadn't seen a beaver. They went back to the camp and ate lunch, still talking about Chief Gnawer.

"We will have to wait until nearly sundown to see them, I suppose," Uncle Ely told the family. "Beavers are night animals. I mean, they do most of their work in the dark, and do not appear until late afternoon. This is a good place to camp, so let's spend the day here and watch for them. Maybe I can catch a few fish for our supper."

The family agreed. During the afternoon Buck caught three fish himself, while Mother showed Ginger how to make a fairy dress, using large leaves pinned together with thorns. About five o'clock Uncle Ely said that he had slipped some poles out of the beavers' dam earlier, and that they probably would be at work repairing the dam about nightfall.

At twilight all five of the travelers were close to

the pond, carefully hidden, and quietly watching. Soon two dark beavers as large as dogs slipped out of the water. They were sleek and shiny, and very graceful. They had small eyes, small ears, feet with claws on them—and strange tails.

"Look! His tail is flat like a trowel!" Buck exclaimed, in an excited whisper.

"Sh-h-h," cautioned Mother. "He uses that to plaster mud on his houses and dams."

Uncle Ely and Father turned at once toward Mother, shaking their heads. "No, Mary, you are mistaken there," Father declared, "beavers do not use their flat tails to plaster mud. They carry mud in their front paws, holding it against their breasts as they swim, and pat it over the sticks with their front paws also. A beaver's tail is used only for swimming."

"Are you sure?" Mother whispered.

Uncle Ely answered for Father. "Yes, he's right, Mary. However, many people have your idea. I have even seen it in books. People once thought beavers did use their tails for trowels, but this has been proven incorrect."

The beavers soon discovered the spot where Uncle Ely had removed a stick or two from their dam.

At once they began to replace the sticks and plaster over the leak.

"They build dams in order to have deep water for their houses," Father explained, holding one arm around Ginger and one around Mother. "They like deep water. It protects them from enemies. They store limbs under it for winter food. You do not see any doors to their houses, do you? The openings, which could be called doors, are always under water. It is in these queer water houses that baby beavers are born. They have fine fur, like that of their parents.

"Notice how strong their jaws are, and what huge teeth they have. That is why these animals are such good gnawers. Their front teeth are like chisels, they are so strong and sharp. Even the baby beavers soon learn to cut into bark for food, and to cut down small trees."

One great big beaver seemed to be swimming about trying to direct the others, although he did a great deal of work also. Soon the watchers were able to count ten beavers swimming with sticks or mud, all hard at work. It was very interesting to peep at them through cracks in the bushes.

Suddenly, however, Buck sneezed.

Instantly the big beaver slapped down on the water with his broad tail. The noise was loud, like that heard when water is struck with an oar or a flat board.

In a twinkling the pond was quiet. Every beaver had disappeared!

"Well, the show's over," Uncle Ely said, speaking aloud now. "That big fellow slapped his tail as a warning. He heard or saw Buck sneeze, and was afraid enemies were near. They will all stay under water for quite a while now. I'm hungry anyway, so let's go to supper."

Buck was sad and very much chagrined as he said, "I'm sorry."

But it didn't help to be sorry.

"When you are studying wild animals in their native homes and playgrounds, you must learn to be very quiet, even if you have to swallow a sneeze," advised Uncle Ely as they walked back to the trailer.

## Chapter XVI

## THE WILD BISON: A Former Westerner

Billy Buck Blair's eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Uncle Ely," he said, presently, "You have an animal in your pocket."

"What did you say?"

"I say you have an animal in your pocket."

Uncle Ely smiled. "Now, now, Buck, you can't catch me on that one. Remember—I caught *you* on the one about the eagle."

"I don't mean the eagle on the coin, Uncle Ely. The animal in your pocket is much bigger than an eagle," answered Buck.

Uncle Ely thought hard for a few seconds.

"I don't understand. No, I believe you are wrong. If it's not an eagle, then I'm sure I have no animal in my pocket."

Ginger began to giggle. She knew about Buck's secret.

"Will you buy us an ice cream cone if we prove it to you, Uncle Ely?" she asked.

"Yes."

"A double-decked cone, one for each of us?" she questioned.

Uncle Ely pretended to frown at this hard bargain. He screwed up his face and glared at the children. But finally he smiled and agreed.

"It's a buffalo! On your nickel, Uncle Ely!" Both children explained, and laughed.

"All right, all right, I'll buy the ice cream," he agreed, laughing with them. "I forgot all about the buffalo nickels. But do you know something? I really wouldn't have to pay if I didn't want to."

"Why?" asked Buck. By this time the lad was very much interested.

"Because that animal on our buffalo nickels is not a buffalo. It's a bison."

"A bison?"

"Yes. Buffaloes have never lived in America. They are found only in Africa and Asia. Buffaloes never have hump backs, as our American animal has. Ours is really a true bison, but the early white men made the mistake in naming him, and the mistake was never corrected. The big shaggy, humped creature is so widely known as buffalo now that he will never be called by his correct name."

Father Blair, who was riding in the sedan with Ely and the children, was greatly interested in this.

"Are you joking, Ely, or serious?" he asked. "I never heard that before."

"I'm not joking. Our buffalo is misnamed. We might even call him Wild Bill Bison, if we care to, for he was once a very wild fellow. When white men came into the western states, they found more bison than any other animal."

Buck had taken a "buffalo" nickel from his pocket and was staring at it.

"He looks like a great big cow, doesn't he, Uncle Ely?"

"That's right. That's what he is, in a way. He is

closely related to the cow. He has hoofs that are split. He eats grass and other vegetable matter. However, he is larger than most cows. The largest one I ever heard of was killed years ago, and weighed a little more than two thousand pounds."

Then Uncle Ely told them that they probably would see one very soon. Within a day or two, he promised, they would be in one of the national parks, and in this great park would be a small herd of wild bison. There they would rent saddle horses and ride out to see the big animals.

In due time the promise was fulfilled. Mother rode with the rest of the family, although she was a little afraid of her horse at first. They saw nearly fifty bison the first few hours of their ride. Some of the animals were unafraid and permitted the people to come quite close.

"Look at the long beard on this one, Uncle Ely!" Ginger noticed that first.

"That's right. He has whiskers that hang down a foot or more. I don't know why he has them."

"Look at his mane," Buck added. "Long hair around his neck and shoulders, almost like the big African lion that we saw in the circus."

"But not much hair on his hind quarters," Uncle

Ely added. "See how the hair and the hump make his front legs look longer than his rear legs?"

"Oh, look at that!" Mother suddenly exclaimed. "It's a baby, a real baby bison!"

Everyone looked. They were delighted to see the little fellow. It had been hidden at first behind its mother, who stood near.

"Nice-looking calf, sure enough," said Uncle Ely.

"Cutest thing I ever saw!" Father was saying, "I wish we could buy one to keep."

"Huh!" Uncle Ely grumbled. "This calf will grow up to be a bull like that one yonder, with sharp horns. He'd toss you over the house some day."

They enjoyed visiting the herd for the remainder of that morning.

"One more thing you ought to remember about the bison," said Uncle Ely that night. "Most of his kind have been killed. When white men were building the first railroads into western America, there were herds in which roamed millions of wild bison. As the herds passed across the tracks, sometimes they would actually stop trains for hours at a time; or in swimming rivers they would block the progress of boats.

"Their flesh was eaten by Indians and white men

alike. Their hides were used for blankets and clothing and teepees. The bison were the most important wild animals of North America.

"Today only a few hundred of the animals are left, such as the herd in this National Park, and in some zoos. I understand now that their numbers are increasing again, and if you children want to be helpful Americans, you will promise yourselves to do what you can to protect them as you grow up. It will be a patriotic thing to do."

## Chapter XVII

## THE BEAR: Monarch of the Wild

One afternoon as the Blair car and trailer were rolling smoothly along with Uncle Ely driving, he began to sing:

"Oh Lawd, ef you cain't help dis nigger,
Please don' you help dat grizzly b'ar!"

At once Father joined in. They were singing in Negro dialect, a song in story about a colored man

who went hunting and found a grizzly bear. The Negro was so frightened by the big bear that he forgot all about his gun. He ran to a tree and climbed it, and the bear sat down under the tree to wait. Buck and Ginger were delighted with the song. When the two men had finished, Buck demanded:

"Did the bear ever get him, Uncle Ely?"

"I don't know. Probably not, although I don't believe the song tells. I imagine the bear grew tired of waiting."

"Would the bear have hurt the man?"

Uncle Ely answered, "Yes, very likely. A grizzly bear is monarch of the wild. He is the strongest, most ferocious fighter in North America.

"Yes, sir! I mean it. I have seen only two grizzlies, outside of zoos, but I have talked to many a trapper and hunter about them. They are the wildest animal we have. However, very few of them are left now."

Mother added, "You are right, Ely! I have read about them. They can even kill cows or horses with one blow of their great paws, they are so strong.

"Yes," continued Mother, "they were such big dangerous animals, and so common when pioneers settled our country, that many stories and songs have been written about them. Father and Uncle Ely

were singing one comic song. There are many more."

"Why didn't the bear climb the tree and get the colored man, Uncle Ely?" Buck asked.

"It's a good question, Buck. I expect you have seen pictures of bears up in trees, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it happens that those were other kinds of bears. Fortunately, the grizzly doesn't climb trees. I'm not sure why he doesn't, but he doesn't. He can swim and fight and run very fast, but I never heard of one climbing. This has saved many a man's life.

"In the old days, when your grandfather was a boy, grizzlies were plentiful in our United States, especially in our western mountain country. Hunters and settlers did not know at first how fierce grizzlies were. A man would raise his rifle and shoot, but the bear wouldn't fall. He would just keep coming toward him, growling and snarling enough to scare even the bravest hunter. He would dash right up to the man, knock him over with one terrific blow, clawing him at the same time. I believe it is said that grizzlies killed more outdoorsmen than any other beast. The ordinary rifle would only wound a grizzly and make him more dangerous, although he might die later."

All the travelers were greatly interested in what

Uncle Ely was saying. He stopped the car and trailer at a railroad crossing, made sure no train was in sight, then crossed the tracks. Soon he continued his true story about grizzlies.

"The biggest grizzlies might weigh up to two thousand pounds—think of it—two thousand pounds! Usually they were nearer eight hundred or twelve hundred, but even that was enough to whip anything else in the wilds.

"They were absolutely unafraid, until man invented some high-powered rifles that could kill at long range. They would run from nothing, and if bothered they would show fight at once. All they asked was to be let alone."

Father interrupted him at this point.

"You keep saying 'were,' Ely. Are there no more grizzlies?"

"Oh, yes, a few. A few in the wilder sections, especially up in Canada. I understand that several have been seen lately in our Rocky Mountain wilderness, where there are no towns or villages for many miles. But too many of them have been uselessly slain. It is a shame to see such fine animals killed."

"Could we ever see a live grizzly, Uncle Ely?" asked Buck.

"We would have to ride perhaps for days and days, on horseback, to find a wild one. Then we might have to turn tail and run for our lives."

The children laughed. This sounded as though it might be fun, but probably it wouldn't be in real life.

"I should like to have a baby one for a pet," said Ginger. "What do bears eat, Uncle Ely?"

"Almost anything. A grizzly would kill a bison, in the old days, and eat its flesh. Or he would spend hours picking up ants or berries and tender buds.

"Of course there are no wild bison left for grizzlies to kill now, but a grizzly today might kill a horse or cow, or a deer. He would be especially glad to find a hollow tree in which bees had stored their honey. He will let the bees sting him in order to get the sweet. He can catch fish by snatching them from brooks and lakes. He will dig out little animals that burrow in the ground, and catch field mice. And he will always eat the berries or buds.

"In fact he eats, and eats, and eats all summer, then goes to bed in winter, very fat. His long winter sleep is called 'hibernation.' He lives on his stored fat while he sleeps. His bed may be a cave or hollow tree, or almost any place where the snow can make a blanket.

"Cubs will be born to the mother bear during the winter. In spring she will lead them out, all very hungry. They will grow fast, and soon learn to take care of themselves. They like to romp and wrestle and play as puppies do."

Toward sunset that day, the travelers entered another of the great national parks, where the scenery was especially grand. The party made camp under towering trees, and not far away was a mountain cliff that seemed to reach right up into the clouds. As soon as the car and trailer stopped, Buck and Ginger jumped out and started to explore. They were out of sight in no time.

Father and Uncle Ely were busy starting a campfire, because the air was chilly. Mother was making biscuit dough to cook in a Dutch oven. Everyone was feeling fine.

Suddenly the three grown people heard a scream.

Mother held her breath in alarm—she knew that was Ginger's scream. They heard Buck's voice in the woods. "Go away!" he shouted. "Go away, let us alone! Run, Sister!"

Something terrible must be happening! In a flash Uncle Ely and Father jumped up and ran toward the woods. They hadn't gone far when Ginger ap-

peared, running down the trail toward them.

Not far behind her came Buck. He would stop every few feet and "shoo" at something. Once he threw a rock at it. Then the something itself appeared—it was a real live bear.

Mother saw the bear and shrieked. She caught Ginger in her arms. Father caught Buck by the hand, and all four of them dashed into the car trailer.

Uncle Ely, however, stopped running. He stood still and looked at the bear.

The animal stopped, too, then came up to Uncle Ely and sniffed.

Next the bear ambled over to the automobile, stood up on his hind legs and sniffed again. Uncle Ely fumbled in a box, took out a slice of bacon and pitched it to the animal, who sat down in a friendly manner and ate it.

"Everything's all right now. He's just a tame bear," Uncle Ely called. "This is not a grizzly, it's a young brown bear. He wasn't going to hurt anybody, he's too tame. Just wanted to beg some food."

Soon the brown bear went on his way to visit other tourists, and everyone laughed again about the adventure. Mother and Ginger were still a little frightened, however.

Just at bedtime that night Uncle Ely spoke to them all. "I am going to change our travel route just a little," he began, "so we can stop over in that next big city for an extra day. I want to take these children to a zoo. It is a shame for any American boy and girl to grow up and not see a live grizzly bear and know him when they see him. We can all learn a great deal and have a good time as well."

## Chapter XVIII

## THE SQUIRREL: A Friendly Robber

"Mother, isn't it time to eat yet?"

Ginger and Buck Blair kept teasing. The family had gone for a picnic in the wild woods, resting again from car travel, and had left the lunch in a big basket hanging on a tree limb while they were hiking. At length Mother admitted that it *was* time for lunch.

But when they returned and took the basket down, Mother found a surprise.

"Why, look here!" she exclaimed. "Someone has

been in our lunch! The food has been nibbled and moved about!"

Everyone looked. The sandwiches had been torn. Pieces of cake had been bitten off. A big sack of peanuts, which mother had put in for the children, was almost empty. Even the sack had been nibbled.

"Aha!" exclaimed Uncle Ely then. "I have an idea who is guilty. There's a thief in the woods."

"A thief?" Buck was excited about it.

"Yes! Look up into this tree carefully, and I think we shall see the thief, maybe several of them. Up there on the trunk, with only his head peeping around at us? That's the thief!"

"It's a squirrel!" said Ginger.

"That's right," said Uncle Ely. "Look, children, I see two more. See them scampering along the high limbs? See their great bushy tails?"

"Yes, sir, but I didn't know squirrels would take things from picnic baskets," Ginger added. "I never saw one outside of a zoo before. Are these really wild squirrels, Uncle Ely?"

"Surely. They run wild in the forest here. But they may not be very much afraid of people, if they haven't been shot at. Let's move off a little way to eat what they have left for us. Then, if we put some

food on the ground, they may soon come for it."

Mother changed that plan, however. She took most of the good food out, and left some bits in the basket, all hanging on the same limb as before. Then the family sat down several feet from the tree. Buck was soon munching a thick cheese sandwich.

"Look!" He pointed, trying to talk with his mouth full. Mother frowned at him and Buck swallowed before he spoke again. "Look! There comes one."

A sleek gray fellow, almost as large as a cat and proudly waving a fluffy tail as long as his body, darted down the tree trunk and into the basket. Once he stood up to peer over the edge of the basket at the people. Then down went his head for a moment and in a flash he was up the tree again carrying a mouthful of food.

"He has a peanut!" Ginger whispered. "See? He is sitting up, eating it. Isn't he pretty?"

"Yes," agreed Mother in a whisper.

At that moment, however, another squirrel came along, saw the first one with the peanut, and at once darted up and grabbed it.

Squeaks, chattering, and the noise of fighting followed. Both squirrels were angry. The nut fell to the ground while they snapped at each other. The

fight lasted but a few seconds, however, and both furry creatures darted away.

Meantime still a third one had seen the nut fall, and he promptly scampered over the ground near it. Then he became cautious. He ran behind the tree trunk for a moment and peeped around at the picnickers. They remained motionless, just looking, so the squirrel came to the nut. There he paused once more to look at the people, sitting on his haunches to do so, his fluffy tail curved in a beautiful arch.

His waiting cost him the nut, because as he stood up a fourth squirrel, more daring, ran across the ground, snatched the nut and was back up the tree in a flash.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mother, as the people all laughed. "They move like lightning, don't they?"

While Father built a campfire to roast some sausages on sticks, Uncle Ely told the children about squirrels.

"You see they are good picnic pals," he began. "Squirrels are naturally friendly to men, if men do not harm them. If we stayed here long, they would learn to come right up to our hands and take food. I have had them climb onto my shoulders, and prowl in my coat pockets. Of course, this was when I had

fed them many times, and they were very tame."

"Do they eat all the time, Uncle Ely?" Buck asked.

"No. They store much of their food for winter. In hollow trees, knot holes, burrows, or other hiding places, you can find the squirrels' winter storehouses. Acorns and wild nuts of all kinds are hidden there. In winter food may be hard to find. Then the squirrels eat what they have stored during summer and fall."

Buck walked slowly under the nearby trees, and presently said that not all of the squirrels were alike. Some had darker fur than others.

"There are several kinds of squirrels," Uncle Ely explained. "Some are gray, some are more nearly brown or red, some nearly black, and some have larger tails than others. All of them are what we call gnawers. That is, they gnaw their food, as do gophers and beavers. They have sharp little claws which help them to climb, and to hold food while they eat. Did you notice how they held the nuts and other tidbits to their mouths with their front feet?"

"Yes, sir," said Ginger.

"All squirrels eat that way. Their jaws and teeth are very strong. They can crack hard nuts that you could not crack with your teeth."

Billy Buck was watching the little animals at play up in the trees. He appeared to be very thoughtful.

"Are squirrels found everywhere, Uncle Ely?" he asked.

"Yes, just about everywhere in our United States."

## Chapter XIX

## THE WOLVERENE: A Mean Northerner

The air was crisp with autumn chill. The horses were not sweating, and his own woolen sweater felt comfortable, Billy Buck noticed. This was the North Country, near the great Dominion of Canada. Buck and Ginger and Uncle Ely were riding in a forest of tall evergreen trees when they came unexpectedly onto a log cabin. At once they were interested, because they saw a huge man with a black beard feeding an animal in a cage.

"'Allo!" called the man in friendly fashion.

"Hello," the three riders answered. "What have you there, a bear?" Uncle Ely asked the question, dismounting.

The dark man grinned.

"Come, I show you," he invited. "This the bes' wild fellow in all the North. The meanest animal. He ver' mean, but we lak him. I catch the baby one, two years ago. Keep him in the cage here. I am name Pierre. And you?"

When introductions were over, the group walked over to study the caged beast.

"Doesn't look exactly like a bear," said Buck.

"No, not bear," Pierre said. "Carcajou."

"Car—what did you say?"

"Carcajou, we call him in Canada. The Americans say wolverene. But he does look lak the bear."

Pierre squatted before the cage and held Ginger on his knee. The animal was snarling at them.

"I've heard of wolverenes," Uncle Ely said, "but never saw one before. You say he is very mean?"

"Oof, he is meanest beast!" Pierre snapped. "All the time I have the trouble with him and his kind. I set traps for animals with good fur to sell. But this carcajou—this wolverene—he take the bait, throw the trap and break it.

"If the trap catch something, the wolverene maybe eat the animal it catch before I get there. He eat anything. He tear into the black bear and whip him. Look—I make him snarl, so you see his great teeth and jaws."

Pierre kicked the iron cage and the wolverene crouched ready to fight. Its teeth appeared to be as long and strong as those in a lion's mouth. It had sharp claws, too. One could easily see how so fierce a creature might fight.

"Do they kill people?" Buck asked.

"No. They do not attack man," Pierre said. "But they steal from him. They steal his bait and his catch in the traps, and they steal from his house lak burglar. Come, I show you."

Pierre took them to a corner of his house, the corner of what must have been the kitchen. There, near the ground, sections of old logs had been replaced by new ones. It was plain that a hole had been cut through the old logs, for their ends were jagged and the sides of others were uneven and gnawed.

"Once in there I have sack of flour, much bacon, beans, canned foods and clothing. I get ready for winter time, when I cannot come out easily for supplies that I need. I make the log cabin strong, and

lock it tight. Then I go away for two day, to set my traps.

"When I come back—*voila* (you see)! The flour, bacon, beans, they all scatter outside! Some is eat, some is just waste. I do not need them to tell me, but I see tracks, and know wolverene has been here. I could not see how he get in, but I learn he gnaw and cut through even the big logs, to make hole into my food cache.

"Inside my cabin, he ver' mean. Many things he just tear up and ruin. What he cannot eat he try to destroy. I do not know why. He ver' mean, this carcajou."

The three visitors studied the repaired cabin, then went back with Pierre to look again at the wolverene. The beast had beautiful dark fur, long and thick as northern animals' fur must be in order to protect them from the long cold winters. His ears were small, his tail short and bushy. He was about the size of a large bulldog.

"Why do you keep this one for a pet, Mr. Pierre?" asked Buck. "I should think you would hate wolverenes."

"It is foolish to hate animals, my little friend. They do only what Nature teach them. It is man's business

to protect himself, lak Nature teach us to do, *n'est-ce pas* (isn't that so)?"

"Now *that's* a thought, Buck!" Uncle Ely said, with enthusiasm.

"The carcajou—we trappers make game with him. He is hard to fool. But we have to try, or we catch no fur to sell. Sometimes we catch him. I have not catch many. But they teach me things. I no longer cache food in plain log cabin, in carcajou country. I keep it inside logs, but in metal boxes too. This animal ver' mean, but ver' smart, too."

"I can see why you admire him and respect him, even though he causes you trouble," Uncle Ely said. "I should say the wolverene is a really important wild citizen."

"*Oui, monsieur* (yes, sir), he is. He is the best—and the worst—northern animal, we think. All outdoor people up here know him and—what you say? —respec' him. He is one fine North American."

"That's the thought, Pierre! One fine North American! Many thanks for introducing us to the wolverene. Are you ready to ride on, children?"

"Yes," said Ginger, "and I am going to tell Mother we saw an animal that was both very bad and very fine. Good-by, Mr. Pierre."

## Chapter XX

## THE LYNX: A Wilderness Cat

Buck and Ginger were staring at something in great surprise and not a little fear. They were in a forest.

"It looks too big for a pet kitty," Buck whispered to his sister.

"But it's some kind of animal, Buck, I know! Do you think we had better run?"

Buck didn't answer, but the animal did.

"Gr-r-r-r-gr-r-r-r!"

"Goodness!" muttered Ginger. "Don't you think we had better go?"

The animal was several feet from them. It was crouched in shadows beside some rocks and shrubbery on the mountain slope. The two children had been out hiking, although not far from camp, when they had suddenly heard a "Gr-r-r-r-r!" nearby. Their curiosity had been aroused.

"It isn't very large," said Buck. "It won't hurt us if we just look at it. Maybe it *is* a cat."

"It looks like a cat, but it's larger."

"Yes, and see what wild eyes it has!"

"They look like—like goblin eyes on Hallowe'en," agreed Ginger. "I wish Uncle Ely were here."

"You go and get him," suggested Buck. "I will stay nearby and see what the animal does."

It wasn't long until Ginger was back with Uncle Ely. They all moved cautiously, not so much in fear of the beast, as in fear of frightening it away so they couldn't have a good look at it. They talked in low tones.

"Oh, yes, now I see it," said Uncle Ely, after studying the shadows. "That's a lynx."

"A—what?"

"A lynx, better known as bobcat or wildcat."

"Oh! Then it is a cat!" Ginger said. "We thought it looked like one."

"But this one is wild, not like the house cats," explained Uncle Ely. "It is much larger and stronger."

"Will he hurt us?"

"He could, but he won't. Wildcats are afraid of people, but if you cornered this one or caught him with your hands, you would have some lively scratching and biting."

"He growled at us awfully, Uncle Ely!" Ginger was still awed.

The three moved a bit closer to the cat's lair, back in the shadows, and instantly a menacing snarl and growl of warning was heard.

"That's cat talk, all right," Uncle Ely said. "But he wouldn't act as dangerous as he sounds. If we get any closer, he will spring out and run for his life. He would—"

Uncle Ely never finished.

Spitting and yowling, the beast leaped from the ground and rushed past the three people.

Ginger screamed. Quick as lightning Uncle Ely jumped in front of the two children. Buck was white with fear, but he made no sound.

In a second the cat was several feet above them, in a tree.

He made a beautiful picture there, his warm red-

dish brown color showing distinctly against the green leaves. He had leaped with the grace and ease that only a cat can show. He crouched again, there on the limb, still growling his warning, stealing quick glances right and left as if ready to flee again, but watching the three people below closely.

"I believe it must be a female," said Uncle Ely. "She may have a den back in those rocks, and there may be kittens. Otherwise she would take no chances on our shooting her; she would have run away already."

"Wildcat kittens!" exclaimed Ginger, no longer frightened. "I wish we could see them. Are they as beautiful as she is, Uncle Ely?"

"No, not quite. You see she has many black spots on her fur, which is thick and long. She looks something like a lion. The babies are cute, but they squirm a great deal, as all little kittens do—until they begin to grow up, I mean."

While the children watched the mother lynx Uncle Ely began hunting around the rocks and bushes. He could see several openings or caves among the rocks, but they were too small for him to enter. He did look carefully for tracks, however.

Buck and Ginger soon joined him in the search.

They began to peer under other brush and shrubs, moving in a circle about the shadowy place where they had found the mother. Ginger moved out of the heavy shadows. She climbed up on some larger rocks into the open sunshine.

"Oh!" she suddenly called. "Here they are!"

The man and boy hastened to her.

Sure enough, two kittens lay in the sun, tiny little creatures, but larger than tame kittens. They stopped playing when the people came near, and one of them growled as his mother had done.

"Stout fellow!" admired Uncle Ely. "Brave, isn't he? He says we'll have a fight on our hands if we interrupt his play."

Ginger wanted to pick up one and cuddle it, but she didn't dare. She knew their tiny claws and teeth were very sharp.

At length Uncle Ely suggested that they leave.

"No need to annoy the wild family," he explained. "They are all trembling in fear. Most men would kill them, and they have come to hate man."

"Tell us about wildcats, please, Uncle Ely?" pleaded Buck. "You never mentioned them before."

"I'm sorry, I meant to. I'm surprised we haven't found one before this, with all the hiking we have

been doing. These animals are found in all parts of the United States, wherever there is a wilderness for them, although man has been killing them as he has other wild creatures.

"They do not live in Mexico, or in warm countries to any extent. Canada has one kind of wildcat, with tips of pointed fur on its ears, and extremely large, wild-looking eyes. It is called a ghost cat because it appears so frightening at times. The wildcat most common in the United States is the one we have just seen—a bay lynx."

Buck asked, "What is the difference between a lynx, a bobcat and a wildcat, Uncle Ely?"

"Not much difference! People in different parts of the country have different names for him. Sometimes the cat will have darker fur, sometimes many spots, and sometimes none. But all of them are lynxes."

Ginger was still thinking about the kittens. She remembered that her mother cat at home often had five or six kittens at a time, usually making a nest in their basement.

"Do you suppose that mother had only twin babies, Uncle Ely? Maybe there were more."

"No, I think not. Wildcats usually have just two."

"Does she nurse them, the way my cat nurses her babies? I mean, feed them milk, and wash their faces, and smooth their fur and all?"

"Yes, indeed! Wild mothers are no less devoted than tame ones, until the babies are able to fend for themselves. The wild kittens soon learn to hunt for their own food. These animals are meat eaters. They catch squirrels and rabbits, field mice, a few birds, and such small game. They are skilled at stalking, as all cats are; they can move so silently that the smaller animal doesn't know danger is near until too late."

"Do these animals ever grow any larger, Uncle Ely? I mean, as large as the mountain lion we caught?" Buck remembered the adventure of the lion hunt.

"No, not that large. Both the lynx and the mountain lion are members of the cat family, and so are closely related, but the lion is much larger. The biggest lynx I ever heard of was killed by President Theodore Roosevelt. It weighed thirty-nine pounds. I imagine they grow a little larger sometimes, but most of them weigh approximately twenty pounds. They are about the size of a small dog."

"Um," murmured Buck. Suddenly the boy was

grinning to himself. Uncle Ely looked furtively at him for a few seconds.

"What's on your mind now, Buck?" he asked. "I can see mischief in your eyes."

"Nothing, sir. Only—I was just thinking about a dog at home. He chases cats all the time. I would like him to meet a grown wildcat, just once!"

Uncle Ely laughed heartily.

## Chapter XXI

## THE OPOSSUM: A Night-Roaming Animal

One day when the Blair car and trailer had rolled down into the southern states, where great fields of cotton were to be seen, Uncle Ely planned an adventure for the children. He left camp one night soon after supper, and came back an hour later.

"I have planned a night hunt for us," he announced. "Several colored people are coming with their dogs at nine o'clock. We are to join them here."

"What are we to hunt, Uncle Ely?" asked Buck, who was already excited.

"The Negroes' favorite animal, one of the most interesting of all wild Americans. And the one with the strangest family, I think."

"Goodness!" Ginger said. "Tell us about him."

"No, not yet. I want you to see him first. But I will tell you his name. It is 'opossum,' sometimes called just plain 'possum."

"Why do we hunt him at night? Won't we stumble over things?"

"We might stumble; but this is a night-roaming animal, and the Negroes' dogs can scent his trail better. I promise it will be fun."

And so it was! The children were excited over the barking hounds, and the six Negroes carrying pine-knot torches as the group walked through the woods.

When the dogs found the opossum's trail and followed it to a persimmon tree, Buck was permitted to climb the tree and shake him out. "Go right on up, Buck," Uncle Ely had encouraged him. "He won't hurt you. Just shake him down."

Buck climbed high. When he saw the small dark form out on a limb, Buck grabbed the limb and shook. Nothing happened.

"Shake hard, Mistuh Billy Buck; shake 'im out," the Negroes shouted encouragement.

Buck gave the limb a tremendous jerking and shaking, and sure enough, down the animal tumbled. It struck some bushy limbs as it dropped and really fell but a short distance from the last limb to the ground. The Negroes were shouting and laughing. The dogs barked wildly and were ordered back. Buck climbed down as fast as he could.

There on the ground, in the light of the torches, lay what appeared to be an animal similar to a giant rat, larger than a cat, all curled up and lying very still.

"Aw-w-w, he's dead!" Ginger mourned. "I wanted to see him alive."

"He not daid, honey," one old man assured her. "He just 'sullin.' "

"He's what?" asked Buck.

Uncle Ely answered this time.

"The 'possum is just playing dead, children," said Uncle Ely. "He really isn't hurt. He will always pretend to be dead when his enemies are near, and he is one of the few beasts in the world which have this method of defense. He hopes we will think him dead, and so go away and leave him alone. Most of his natural enemies, even dogs that aren't trained, would do so."

"Well!" exclaimed Buck. "I never heard of that before. I think he is a wise animal."

The opossum had long gray bristling hair, a long nose like a rat's, and a peculiar long tail with no fur on it.

"Uncle Ely," Buck suddenly thought of something, "do you know what I saw? This opossum hung by his tail, as a monkey does, before I shook him down."

"That's right. Very few animals can do that, too."

Suddenly the dogs yowled a few feet away. A Negro ran to them.

"Heah's de old mammy 'possum and all de chillun!" the Negro shouted gleefully. "De dawgs found 'em in a hollow stump! Whoop-eee!"

Everyone ran over to see the family. Torches were held so they would throw light on this new find. There crouched a mother opossum, with a dozen or more babies, no bigger than small rats, clinging to her back and sides! But the queerest thing was the way they used their tails. The mother's tail was curled up over her back and the babies' tails were wrapped around it to help them hold on! Ginger giggled in high excitement. Buck jumped up and down, laughing with the colored folk.

This mother opossum didn't "sull," as the Ne-

groes would say. She was snarling, ready to fight for her babies, although she also appeared to be very much afraid.

"Let's not bother her too much," suggested Uncle Ely. "The babies need her."

"Sho' do," one Negro agreed. "We let her go 'bout her business."

As they watched, the mother began to edge away, carrying her family of young on her back. As she stretched up to climb a tree, Buck quickly pointed.

"Look! Look!" he exclaimed. "On the front of her body. Two more babies are peeping out of a front pouch, with just their heads showing!"

It was true. Everyone saw it. The babies in the soft hairy pouch appeared much smaller than the ones on top of the mother.

"Sho', she do dat," the oldest colored man explained. "She carry two sets of chillun at once. De bigges' ones, dey rides up in de observation car on top. De littles' ones, dey rides down in de Pullman berths, whar dey can sleep all dey pleases."

"That's right," said Uncle Ely. "Opossums raise a great many babies. The mother may be carrying two families at the same time. See how she climbs with them? There she goes, out of sight among the

limbs and leaves up in the trees. She will eat ripe persimmons when we go away."

The party started back to the first tree, where they had left the first fat opossum on the ground. But when the people got there he was gone!

"I tole you so! I knowed he'd do dat!" cried the oldest Negro angrily. "Aw shuh, we done got so het up looking at de mammy and chillun, we forgot all 'bout dis one! Now he done quit sullin' and run off. Aw shuh!"

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00025555466